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NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES • EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Storytelling and Appalachia

• a short history of storytelling in Jonesborough, Tennessee

• Interviews: Sharyn McCrumb • Donald Davis• •Gary Carden • Judy Byers on Ruth Ann Musick

Stories • Poems • Reviews •

Correspondents for *Harper's Magazine* descend Tumbling Creek in East Tennessee, 1858. They wrote about their adventures and their rescue by a local man. The story is still being told in Tennessee today.

*Drawing by Porte Crayon, **Harper's Magazine**, 1858. Cover design by Frances Greenberg.*

Storyteller

A First Amendment Poem

Meaning what I say is not saying what
I mean and yet I
do not always know
the difference.
I cannot speak
the unspeakable,
I say instead those things
best left unsaid.
Life is short,
love is unrequited,
the dead do not
take questions.

I can tell this:
there is enough
of truth to offend
everybody.

— Jo Carson

Jo Carson recently won an award from the Fund for New American Plays for her drama, ***Preacher With a Horse to Ride*** *(excerpted in* ***Now and Then****, Fall 1988). She is* ***Now and Then*** *poetry editor.*

Fall 1993
Volume 10, Number 3

NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

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"Real life can always use a good stretch"
— Radney Foster

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The Power to Create Identity

Scholars generally agree that spoken narrative is the dominant form of human communication and the oldest of the human arts. They suggest that humankind may be most aptly described as *homo narrans* or *homo histrio* — creatures who make sense of and celebrate living through storytelling. We tell others about our life experiences in the form of stories; we advance arguments in story form; we preserve family and community history and traditions in ritualized storytelling.

Many people wax poetic when describing storytelling. A sample of comments I have read and heard include: "I surrender all to a storyteller"; "let us enter into the magic world of the storyteller"; "your present world will dissolve and you will for the moment be possessed by the mysterious world of the spirit: the story"; and finally, one of my favorites from a novel about a mountain storyteller in Appalachia: "He'd already been telling stories for a year. . . and he felt keenly a desire to cause other people to feel as he'd felt, to make them live so vividly in the world created by his own imagination that spit drooled down their chins before they realized they'd forgotten they inhabited bodies." While we may dismiss such comments as romantic and not very incisive about story performance, they are perceptive about the threshold over which listeners cross when they become engaged in the telling, and they recognize the potential power of stories to transform lives and cultures.

Storytelling has the capacity for evoking generic bonds between human beings, a kind of egalitarian human communion that anthropologists call communitas. In a story, all physical laws and social rules may be suspended, so that stories allow us time and space to reflect on and criticize ourselves and our cultures and to pose new models for living our own lives and changing our societies. Storytelling, when not sapped of its vitality by commercialization and strictures of social respectability, is a subversive activity. Telling stories has the power to construct both individual and cultural identities.

Much of Appalachia's history may be understood as a struggle over power to tell the region's story and thereby shape the region's identity in the public mind. A first rule of cultural hegemony, or dominance of one culture over another, is control of the means of information, control of myth-making or storytelling functions. From the beginning of the region's history, the region's stories were told by those who had access to the media of persuasion and who had reason to create Appalachia's identity as a culture of otherness and a culture in need of redemption. Some would argue that this Appalachian identity developed because there were no competing stories that offered alternative views of the culture. Of course, there were always competing stories; Appalachian people have stories of their own lives and culture in which they actively "out-wit" whatever life gives out, rather than being the passive "dim-wits" or "half-wits" of the stories created about them. But, for years, the people of the region had little access to the means of informational power, especially the mass media. For the last decade or so, however, people in Appalachia have offered competing stories of their experience, refusing to accept the long-standing, popular model of their culture as a valid model for their present and future.

In this issue of *Now and Then*, we offer some of the stories and voices of storytellers in our region and some reflections on the craft of storytelling. We point with pride to the fact that Appalachia has become the center of the storytelling enterprise in this country; Jonesborough, Tenn., is mecca for storytelling enthusiasts, and our university, East Tennessee State University, provides opportunity for serious academic study of storytelling. Plus, throughout Appalachia there are countless "liar's benches" in front of country stores, front and back porches, and a host of other culturally appropriate places for "tellin' a good 'en." There are also in Appalachia those "stories I ain't told nobody yet," as writer Jo Carson reminds us, that need to be heard. Part of the mission of our center is to help those stories, and all the valuable stories of our region, be heard. We need your help in that effort. We need you as a friend of the center.

—Jean Haskell Speer
Director

Raising Doubt

Too often Mother storied me -
playing flip sides of truth -
saying I had to be dreaming
when I watched Uncles John
and Thurman batter one another
with bloody two-by-fours
during their gin-muscled brawl
at Jake Graber's carrot farm,

telling me how wrong I was
for insisting Uncle Thurman
died drunk driving up a tree
after downing his last dime
in New Straitsville's taverns -
Mother had him all worn out
coming back way past bedtime
from job hunting in Pittsburgh.

Mother storied me all my life -
raising a doubter of her truth -
storied about the vanished case
of ringworm I wore the year
I got mumps for Christmas,
storied about our outdoor toilets
and how Dad deserved a halo
for bruising me to goodness.

No doubt she's storying about
being dead these thirty years.

— Glenn McKee

Glenn McKee, an Ohio native, lives in Waterville, Maine. Publications include ***Appalachian Heritage, Potato Eyes, Poetpourri,*** *and, frequently,* ***Now and Then****. An earlier version of this poem appeared in* ***Black River Review.***

Archives of Appalachia

Studying Stories

Storytelling is more than simply giving real life a stretch in the recounting. In Appalachian culture, as in other societies throughout the world, storytelling serves to entertain, to recount historical events, to teach moral lessons and acceptable social behavior, and to explain aspects of the natural and supernatural world. Stories may be studied as windows to a culture, or storytelling may be studied as a communication technique. The archives holds both print and non-print materials to support research on regional tales and storytelling.

Among the non-print materials held by the archives are several collections containing recordings of traditional tales as well as modern-day storytellers. The Burton-Manning Collection includes 155 audio recordings collected by the two professors and their students in western North Carolina and East Tennessee. The recordings include Jack tales, Pat and Mike tales, ghost stories, animal tales, and devil tales. In the Broadside Television, Inc., Records are video recordings of early storytelling workshops and festival sponsored by the National Association for the Perpetuation and Preservation of Storytelling in Jonesborough, Tenn. The Barbara McDermitt Collection and the Appalachian-Scottish Studies Collection contain recordings on both regional and Scottish stories and tellers.

In addition to these non-print materials in the archives, Special Collections has a good core collection of books on Appalachian stories and storytelling. Among those are such published collections as *The Jack Tales*, *The Grandfather Tales*, and *Wicked John and the Devil* by Richard Chase and *Sang Branch Settlers*, *In the Pine*, and *South of Hell-fer-Sartin* by Leonard Roberts. Other notable publications in the collection are *Smoky Mountain Folks and Their Lore* and *Yarns and Tales from the Great Smokies* by Joseph Sargent Hall and *Ghosts Along the Cumberland* by William Lynwood Montell. These books are only a sample of the printed materials available in Special Collections.

For more information about our collections or the donation of manuscripts or audio visual materials, write the Archives of Appalachia, Box 70665, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN 37614-0665 or call (615) 929-4338.

—Norma Myers
Head, Archives of Appalachia
and Marie Tedesco,
Public Service Archivist

"As long as Appalachians do not have the power to confirm their own identity (and that power can come from story), they will be defined by others."

—Jim Wayne Miller

from "The Kentucky (Re)Cycle," a review of Schenkkan's *The Kentucky Cycle* in *Appalachian Heritage*

Reece Museum

Preserving Our Stories

In June and July of 1992, the Reece Museum hosted an exhibition we called "Passing It On" in which storyteller and actress Anndrena Belcher recounted the stories of her family. Encompassing her mother's paintings and personal articles from her grandmother's family, each piece in the exhibit reminded Anndrena of a story. It was fitting, therefore, that the museum's programming featured two performances by Anndrena telling her stories to complement the exhibit.

The collections of the Reece Museum are much like that exhibit. Each item has its own story, and many of these stories are recorded in the files of the museum's collection records. The museum has collected and preserved art and artifacts — and stories — from our region for over 50 years. Just this past spring the Reece added to its collections a group of items from Melvina Cantrell of Jonesborough. When we visited Cantrell to review this donation, including kitchen pots, a blanket, and quilts from her parents' families, she provided an abundance of information concerning each piece.

The bean pot, which was used to cook beans, greens, and meat, belonged to her mother who had eight children. Her mother, Motie Ward Rich, bought this pot through her father's general store when she married in 1915.

The coffeepot and grinder also came from the general store and belonged to Cantrell's grandfather, William Ward. He presented the grinder to Cantrell in 1952 when he feared his death was near. He wanted to be certain that the grinder and the stories it represented would be passed on to his granddaughter.

One quilt was made by Cantrell's mother when the federal government provided fabric and other materials as a Depression-era project. The women gathered in a community center to work on their quilts, and this addition to the Reece collections is one product of that effort.

Melvina Cantrell is fortunate to know so much about her family's history — learned through stories told to her as a child and young adult. By providing detailed information for each item in her collection, she has passed these stories on to the surrounding region via her donation to the Reece Museum. Her legacy of family stories will be preserved along with the artifacts, providing a basis for researchers while inspiring other "story custodians" in our area to share their heritage.

Cantrell is one of over 330 donors to the Reece Museum's collections. Much of the collection is on permanent exhibition, and the labels on these items are currently being rewritten to reflect the special story of each. Often these stories come to light through research in the museum's historical records or from information provided by visitors. Periodically, someone visiting the museum will offer a story about a particular object and we appreciate these efforts because that's how our stories are preserved.

— Margaret Carr
Registrar

Exploring the Meaning of Stories

Storytelling on the hoof definitely takes center stage in this issue. It's a natural subject for *Now and Then*. Jonesborough, Tenn., just a few miles from our office, is the undisputed capital of the storytelling world because it is the headquarters of NAPPS, the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling. This is the organization which started the current storytelling revival and holds a renowned storytelling festival every year. Even closer to home, ETSU offers the only master's degree in the country in storytelling. And Appalachia is unsurpassed in the number and quality of storytellers who write poetry and fiction, so we have included contemporary work by and about the region's authors and poets.

We found, as we often do when we put together our special focus issues, some common threads. Writers and those who tell stories out loud both explore what inspires — or compels — a person to tell a story. They explore what stories do for the audience and for the teller, how one's era, class, and culture affect what is included in a story, and how a story is affected by being told by a person from a different era or values.

In this issue we have also looked at storytelling business, training, controversies, storytellers' lives and art, and poems and stories that not only tell a good story but explore the meaning of a story, the life of a story, the culture of storytelling.

What we haven't talked about — maybe we've taken it for granted — is the wonderment of stories, written or oral. Stories, at their best, can help us define ourselves in new ways, give us a sense of ourselves in this world and what we have in common with others. A story coming at the right moment can create transformations in people, can help people understand their own lives and the lives around them. And stories provide one of the best entertainments there is.

Now and Then has always tried to achieve some of the above. I wonder how often the stories we publish make some magic for our readers. Have you felt at times that you receive an affirmation of where you live? Have you read something in the magazine and said, "Yes, that put into words something that I have vaguely felt but not been able to express"? Or, "That put a new angle on something, it made me think in a new, fuller way about the place where I grew up."

Though we receive letters, we don't do anything with them except bask or blush, depending on whether the message contains praise or criticism. The magazine will be 10 years old in 1994. In the summer we will publish an anniversary issue. For that edition, we'd like to encourage you to write and tell us what this magazine has meant to you. What have you learned? What have you read that was important to you? Any epiphanies? And look to the future. What would you like to see in the next 10 years?

Your input is important. We'll publish as many letters as we can.

— Pat Arnow
Editor

The Brief Moment of Fathers

Finally in the dark quiet, in the arms
of your own house, an even ticking comes
from the mantle. Outside the faces of lilies
fold one by one. Upstairs the one you love
is no more a girl, but changed immeasurably.
On your chest your new son sucks the sweet air.

So much has prepared you: your father's hand
at your shoulder, stern or tender as he saw fit.
An occasional word about the late hour.
His silent knowing as you passed in your fine suit,
the aisle roped in garland, to the hands of another.
You step with her onto land so new it's unnamed.
You want to test the cloudy stream, wade up to your waist,
decipher the talk and high sweep of whatever has wings.

Before you know it, she's laboring a whole night
and day until there's a child asleep on your chest.
You count the shallow breaths as if each one
is his last. Before long, you're patting him in time
with the clock. Someday it will be like this:
Together watching the stream saddle the land
you have claimed in one voice, together
encountering its depths. Preparing him
with an occasional word, stern or tender
as you see fit. Dying to touch his fine suit
as he walks past the gold rope.

Tonight his backbone is a string of pearls
to be counted like years, passing even now,
tick-ticking away. Nothing has prepared you for this.
Wait a brief moment, in these arms.
The lilies will show themselves soon enough.
The early hour will singe the tops of oaks.
Let your steps stretch out like dropped crumbs.
Taste them slowly. Learn each pearl by heart.
Tell him the same story at lunchtime,
at bedtime, in the garden, in the car.
You be the prince, I'll be Darkwing Duck.
Before long, you'll say it in your sleep,
watching him run down to the stream,
wading in without you, to the edge
of his milky dreams.

— Linda Parsons

Linda Parsons, a Knoxville, Tenn., resident, has written a musical ***Lambarene*** *and has had her work in* ***The Georgia Review, Iowa Review, Birmingham Poetry Review,*** *and other literary magazines.*

STORYTELLING AND JONESBOROUGH: A MUTUAL REVIVAL

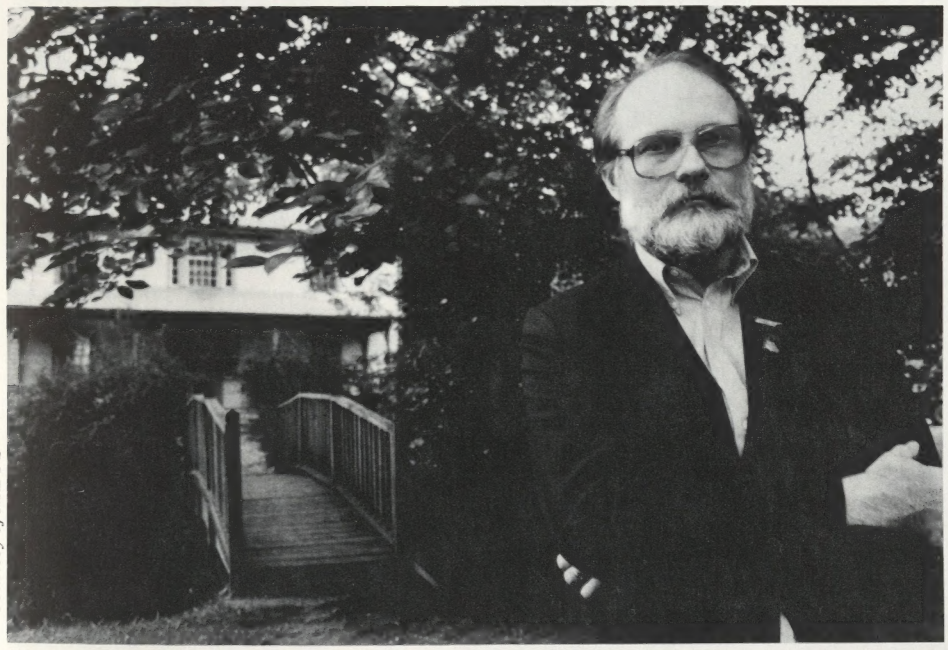
Joseph Daniel Sobol

The National Storytelling Festival was founded in 1973 by a local entrepreneur in a somewhat tattered East Tennessee county seat. At its inception it was a standard-issue fall festival for a small Southern town with one eye on the past and the other on the tourist trade. Yet in a few years it grew into a pilgrimage center for neophytes and initiates of an ancient art. The art of storytelling had seemingly been entombed by a five-century juggernaut of print and electronic media but now sprang up, pale and howling, into the October light.

What is it about, this "storytelling revival?"

In the 1969 book, *The Feast of Fools*, Harvey Cox pointed out that we need a background or field against which to really "see" any object or phenomenon. "Music pumped into every closet and corridor by Muzak we may vaguely hear, but we do not really *listen* to," he wrote. "Music on a concert stage we listen to. . . An old automobile attracts our attention and becomes a work of 'art' when it is removed from the highways and set on a display pedestal at a fair."

The National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough plucked the antique narrative vehicle from the backyard cinder blocks of culture and gave it a pedestal upon which to stand as art. It was a classic example of invented tradition. The creators of the National Storytelling Festival had the mother wit to bring together spokespeople from scattered traditions which may have had common roots but few points of contact. The organizers enlisted storytellers in an effort to give a name (the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling — NAPPS), a place (Jonesborough), and an emotional tone to the storytelling revival.



Courtesy of NAPPS

Jimmy Neil Smith, founder of the National Storytelling Festival and director of NAPPS, headquartered in the more than 150-year-old Slemons House in Jonesborough.

The storytelling revival of the 1970s and '80s is one of many folklore-based artistic movements extending deep into our cultural history. Folk songs, tunes, dances, costumes, games, rituals, as well as folktales, have long served as vehicles for complex political, social, and spiritual agendas. These are advanced on the left hand, as it were, while the right hand's vigilance is momentarily relaxed. Put another way, these folk arts have often served to bring together people whose only other way of meeting might be in combat.

The background of this storytelling revival was the cultural earthquake of the 1960s. The social and economic tidal wave of mainstream America seemed to be carrying us away from storytelling and story-listening, away from roots, from memory, and from the caretaker's sense of the past. At the same time, the '60s marked massive cultural revitalization movements, organized and spontaneous collective efforts to create a more satisfying culture.

The great popular movements during that decade, however, were overwhelmingly antagonistic in tone. The issues raised by the sexual "revolution," by the hippie culture, by the anti-war, civil rights, and women's movements, were framed in such violently clashing subcultural narratives that they threatened to shred society by race, class, gender, generation, and affiliation. Cultural programming emerged from those movements as a kind of social camouflage. Artistic sublimations allowed psychic heat to diffuse itself in ritual and ceremony. One such sublimation was the storytelling movement.

After the turmoil of the late 1960s and the early 1970s — from the watershed Woodstock and Altamont concerts, the traumatic spate of political assassinations and massacres, the whimpering end to the Vietnam War, and the national catharsis

Courtesy of NAPPS

Barbara Freeman and Connie Regan (now Regan Blake) tell stories in the park at the NAPPS 1976 Storytelling Festival. On this site today, storytellers perform in a tent that holds 1,150 people and is always so full that the audience spills out onto the grass outside.

of Watergate — the wider public environment went into a cooling period. There was an instinctive sense that radical changes in community and self were tragically frail without disciplines of awareness and communication. There was a surge of meditation practices, personal-growth and encounter groups, intentional communities. Images of healing and connectedness began to unseat images of revolution and destruction in the iconography of a generation.

The giant-killing tone of the mass movements of the previous decade now turned to confront the demons of the personal psyche, often through the mechanisms of communal encounter, ritual, and celebration. Teachers like the influential scholar of mythology, Joseph Campbell, and his students, emerged from a variety of Western and Eastern traditions. They advanced the notion that traditional myths and folktales offered time-honored models for performing psychological tasks — not externally, as in warfare, but inwardly, in the realm of metaphor.

The storytelling revival offered many of us a way to bring that inward movement back out into the world, in a festive, optimistic expression. Harvey Cox again sounded the tone in *The Feast of Fools*: "I have become aware that there is an unnecessary gap between the world-changers and the life-celebrators." He went on:

> The epochal crisis of Western consciousness which we call the death of God is not just a passing fad. It is the result of a cumulative history that includes industrialization and the ascent of technology, pluralism, modern science, and cultural self-consciousness. Most important, however, the vivid cultural experience of God's absence, disappearance, or death occurred in a civilization where festivity in all its forms was in a state of steady decline.

The difference between the confrontational drama of a street theater performance and the guided inner fantasy of a storytelling event is emblematic. Connie Regan-Blake, for example, went from being an organizer of the Tennessee chapter of NOW (National Organization for Women) in the early 1970s, to being a traveling storyteller and proselytizer for NAPPS. Her personal movement exemplifies the shift from the revolutionary rhetoric of the '60s (We want it NOW!) to the evolutionary dream time of the '70s (Sleep on it: NAPPS). In going off to seek their fortune as storytellers, Regan-Blake and her cousin and performing partner Barbara Freeman went from confronting the Giant with a club (bravely, but foolishly, since the giant was carrying a tree), to keeping him entranced with gently subversive dreams, even as the treasure they were seeking to recapture from him danced unopposed into their pockets.

They left their jobs as children's librarians in order, as they told me, "to spend their lives at a festival," answering a Dionysian call that still resounded from the 60s culture. They were buoyed by a sense of plenty and protection that lingered from the postwar boom of our childhoods. But their careers, and those of many of their storytelling companions, have been dedicated to the service of festivity itself. Storytelling has been a vessel through which festival could incarnate in our culture — not explosively, as at Woodstock, but sustainably, as at Jonesborough.

The concerns of the storytelling revivalists and the civic revivalists in Jonesborough have been consistently identified with each other through the unifying agency of NAPPS. To visitors, it was as if Lake Wobegon had materialized in the hills of Tennessee. Jonesborough was remote but accessible by road, complete with a miraculously preserved historic townscape and a populace eager to play host to our fantasies of a time and place Before the Fall. In fact, that sweet illusion, so palpable to those of us who arrived at the Festival after, say 1977, was only achieved through conscious choice, creative leadership, determined political maneuvering, some heavy-duty cosmetic engineering, and a confluence of social forces that Jonesborough had the simple grace to ride.

By the end of the 1960s, storytelling and Jonesborough had both gotten frail and decrepit. An elderly art and elderly town had been left stranded by the new electronic and automotive bypasses zipping around them. It was then, in the course of a prospective sewer project, that downtown Jonesborough was surveyed. It was determined that the only way this decaying real estate could be made to pay for its upkeep was through an infusion of tangible and intangible capital. Restoration moneys available then in the

continued on page 8

THAT FATEFUL DAY IN THE CAR

How Jimmy Neil Smith Conceived the National Storytelling Festival

In 1972, Jimmy Neil Smith was a journalism teacher at Science Hill High School in Johnson City, Tenn., eight miles from his hometown of Jonesborough. One day, he says, he was driving some of his students to nearby Elizabethton to have the school paper, *Hilltop*, printed at the *Elizabethton Star*. The noisy talk in the car quieted as the group's ear was hooked by storyteller Jerry Clower on the radio. They listened and laughed and slapped their knees, delighted by Clower's account of coon hunting in Mississippi. "Wouldn't it be nice if we could bring storytellers to Jonesborough from throughout the United States to tell stories together?" Smith asked.

In January of 1973, he asked the same question of the Jonesborough Civic Trust. The Trust said that was a good idea and that Smith himself should organize it. Nine months later the National Storytelling Festival was born. The first performer was Jerry Clower, whose coon-hunting tale had engendered Smith's idea. He performed in a high school gymnasium to a capacity crowd. The next day, lesser-known storytellers mounted an old farm wagon in Courthouse Square and spun tales to a smaller crowd. The next year, the toddling festival was held on the town's porches and lawns. Smith's brainchild grew so fast that porches quickly gave way to meeting halls and then to the large tents still used today.

A handful of storytellers appeared at the festival in 1973. This year, 29 performers were featured in events that included a Native American showcase, a midnight cabaret, a ghost story concert, and a performance by the Little Theatre of the Deaf.

How do the other people in the car on that fateful day in 1972 remember the event? David Cortner is now an analyst for the computer services center at East Tennessee State University. His version is less clear-cut: "I literally had not thought of it at all until reading an account of the trip Jimmy Neil Smith counts as the seminal moment and recognizing it as a familiar event looked at sideways. I do not recall any knee-slapping, but I do remember much discussion of talking chain saws and wildcats in trees ('Poke him out, John!' etc). [At that time, Clower was promoting a particular brand of chain saw.] I don't remember if Jerry Clower was on the radio, or on tape, or if Jimmy Neil brought him up out of the blue. My best guess is that he had been nurturing the idea of the storytelling festival for some time and that he bounced this idea off the journalism "folkies" as if it were something he'd just thought of. On the other hand, I also seem to recall talk about how to get in touch with Jerry Clower to arrange such a thing, so maybe it was a fresh idea.

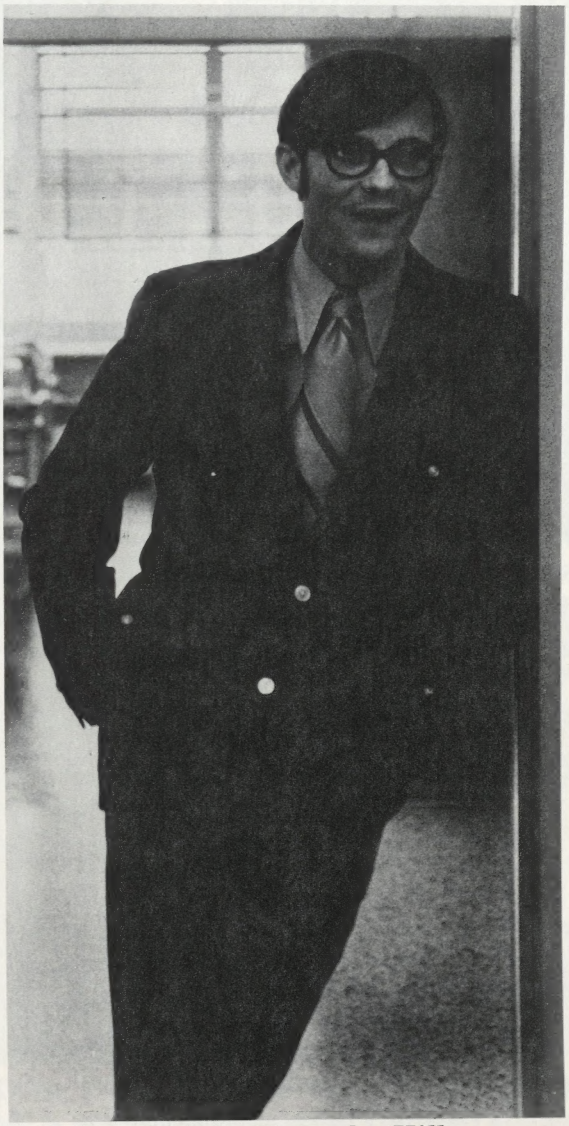
"It did not by any means seem a momentous event, and I don't remember that anyone (except maybe Jimmy Neil Smith, by the evidence) was particularly excited by the prospect of getting Jerry Clower down to Jonesborough to tell stories. An okay sort of idea, but nothing terribly exciting in the grand scheme of things. I was surprised some weeks later that he had followed up on it and that things seemed to be rolling."

Cortner remembers that Bill Counts, now an artist and actor, was among the half-dozen or so people in the car. "Was I?" Counts asks. "I did go along on a few of the trips to Elizabethton, but I don't remember the Clower incident. Oh, I remember Jimmy Neil talking about Clower, but he talked about him on several occasions. Not as much as he talked about the church, though. He'd say, 'Would I be crazy to put a restaurant in there?' But he'd already made up his mind to do it" (the Parson's Table, which he opened in 1973. It's still in operation, though with different owners).

Counts initially viewed the festival idea with skepticism. "When it was being talked about I remember thinking, 'Yeah, right. This will go places.' Now it's hard to think of a time when it wasn't an entertainment industry."

No matter how each "folkie" remembers the car ride, all would probably agree that having been there carries a certain cachet. In fact, some people who "remember" the ride were reputedly not even in the car. Says Cortner, "It wasn't that big a car, let alone a Blue Bird school bus! Now I am astonished (and vaguely, unreasonably, discomfited) to discover that at least one-hundred-and-one people must have been in that car."

—Laurene Scalf



Jimmy Neil Smith at the *Hilltop* office in 1972. *David Cortner*

A former Jonesborough resident, Laurene Scalf now lives in Louisville, Ky.

continued from page 6

form of state and federal grants and tax abatements were tangible incentives. But the movement toward historic preservation meant an equivalent infusion of self-consciousness.

The National Register of Historic Places included the entire downtown on their rolls in 1969. Historic Jonesborough Days, a July Fourth weekend street fair, was initiated in 1970 as a way of bringing regional and national attention to the work going on there. It was so successful that local boosters began casting around for other kinds of events to bring outsiders to town in the winter, spring, and fall. This was where festival founder Jimmy Neil Smith came in.

Smith worked with the Jonesborough Civic Trust, which had been formed to administer the Historic District. The first major restoration project undertaken by the Trust was to pull down a two-story 18th-century log cabin that was crumbling in the woods two miles from town. They reconstructed the cabin log by log in the center of Main Street between the 1797 Federal-style Chester Inn and the 1840s Greek Revival Presbyterian Church. The Christopher Taylor Cabin became the town's first Visitors' Center and the trademark registration site for the storytelling festival.

During 1975 and '76, power lines, telephone poles and streetlights were replaced with underground cables and gaslight-style lampposts. Red brick replaced concrete sidewalks. One by one, huge storefront signs from the 1940s, '50s and '60s came down to reveal details of the older buildings. The buildings themselves were sandblasted and repainted; foundations were secured, later additions were torn off. By whatever means available, the town renewed itself by being antiqued, even to its very name. Digging through old documents, "Jonesboro" historians determined that the original spelling had been "Jonesborough." The eroded spelling was seen to have coincided with the town's economic decline. So, in 1983, the town passed an ordinance restoring "Jonesborough" to its full historic dignity.

The result now looks and feels like a town at once in and out of time — *in* because people still live and work there, unlike a Disneyland or a Williamsburg — but *out* because its every perspective has been shaped by an intense, multi-storied dialogue with ancestors. The entire historic district also happens to be about the scale of a mid-sized shopping mall. Like Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, it makes a compact environmental theater set for the festival comedy of artists, consumers, and citizens.

The success of Jonesborough's civic transformation lay in its finding a fit, a synergy, between its new local industries and the transformation of the American economy as a whole. The economy shifted away from the production and distribution of agricultural and manufactured goods and into the production and distribution of information and images. Tourism exports the image of a place while importing travelers and their money. It's a subtle, post-industrial form of exchange. The place stays put. Its image goes out, in mediated forms. People come and go, leaving dollars behind, taking with them tokens of the imagination: heritage, history, a sense of the past, of a simpler world. A life that was once hard, brutal, real, and gracious in poor, fugitive moments stolen from the imagination, can now be altogether gracious, even in its brutality, because it's all imaginary, like a dream or story. It's *once upon a time*.

Mississippi storyteller and comedian Jerry Clower headlined the first National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough in 1973. *David Cortner*

What has the storytelling revival actually revived? Was the family- and community-based folk art of storytelling really dead or dying at the beginning of the 1970s? Did the proliferation of storytelling festivals and professionals working in schools, libraries, and concert halls really do anything to bring it back? Or have we mainly succeeded in creating a new American vaudeville circuit, bustling with retrofitted librarians, musicians, actors, ministers, lecturers, and jugglers? The answers are not simple.

The storytelling world, at its best, is a place of great emotional commitment to the values of family and community tradition-bearing. Audiences can come away feeling embraced and renewed in the artful sharing of those values.

There are those on the circuit whose

commitment is to *story*, above all, as an aesthetic value, and to the special relationship between teller and listeners that grows out of the moment of mutual story experience. These tellers have helped restore the *art* of storytelling to a place of honor among other arts.

The storytelling world, though, is subject to the laws and stresses of other show business networks. There is a gravitational pull of those laws — the star system, the bottom line, the dynamics of familiarity and novelty. These forces that govern mass market performance have drawn the National Storytelling Festival — and other festivals in its wake — a long way from the back porch. Family and community storytelling goes on, I think, only lightly brushed by reflected glory from these revival events. Meanwhile, the revival runs its course in the artificial light of popular art and culture, drawing nourishment from its traditional roots, but blooming in an utterly transformed environment.

NAPPS embraced and promoted the term storytelling revival in its very earliest public presentations, along with the death-and-resurrection narrative it implies. In part, the terminology may have been imposed upon the organization by the language of folklore funding agencies with which NAPPS had to negotiate in those early days. But the term also served NAPPS' agenda quite well back then. To less urgent extent, it still does.

It's easy to forget, after two decades of struggle to grow into its name, that NAPPS began as yet another of Jimmy Neil Smith's local civic ventures. Smith's background is avowedly not storytelling. His is a restless civic activism that has taken virtually everything in the local culture, from history to politics to festivity to food, as raw material. He opened his first restaurant, the Parson's Table, in a deconsecrated church on the same weekend as the first National Storytelling Festival in 1973. Several other historic properties in town have passed through Smith's hands. One became a complex of antique and gift shops, another, a second restaurant. Two others have been headquarters for NAPPS at various stages of its growth. During key years of NAPPS' consolidation, Smith won election as alderman, then mayor. He habitually speaks of the preservation effort as having rescued Jonesborough from becoming "just another dying Southern town." In fact, it was Jimmy Neil Smith and his allies in the little town of Jonesboro, who saw *themselves* as having died and been resurrected through the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, "Storytelling Capitol of the World."

To visitors, it was as if Lake Wobegon had materialized in the hills of Tennessee. Jonesborough was remote but accessible by road, complete with a miraculously preserved historic townscape and a populace eager to play host to our fantasies of a time and place Before the Fall.

Folklore-based revival movements, whether they be of traditional storytelling, music, crafts, dance, or ritual, are not generally about bringing back what *was*, so much as they are about securing a new cultural integration. They represent instinctive retreats to the sanctuary of oral tradition in the face of some new onslaught of technological alienation. Borrowing traditions is often necessary in a revival to fill a sense of cultural dispossession. Adoption, or at least wet-

Ray Hicks, who told stories to a few dozen people at the 1973 Storytelling Festival, is a perennial favorite. His rapt audience now numbers in the hundreds each year.

Courtesy of NAPPS

nursing, is an attractive option when the mother-culture seems to have run dry.

Revival movements also may seek to claim some political territory on behalf of those who have no other weapon than a traditional practice in which the graftable roots of identity are preserved. The folksong revivals of this century were artistic wedges of the labor movement, the civil rights movement, and the peace movement. The storytelling revival has helped give peaceful form to various ethnic identity movements, to the human potential movement, the men's movement, and several branches of feminism.

Have we mainly succeeded in creating a new American vaudeville circuit, bustling with retrofitted librarians, musicians, actors, ministers, lecturers, and jugglers? The answers are not simple.

The revival story also connects us to the ideological force of conservationism. When the first National Storytelling Festival was launched, Earth Day was three years past. Jonesborough was in the process of making itself a living laboratory of cultural conservation as an engine of economic change. The steam of this effort was easily piped into the realm of the imagination. Stories became historic structures, or alternately, endangered species, of the psyche. If we could only be prevailed upon to *save* these scraps of our past that lay unnoticed all around us, as lovely and sad as the autumn leaves at festival-goers' feet, we would be restoring something precious and irreplaceable to our endangered culture and our endangered spirits. The idea helped to channel the save-the-world idealism of the 1960s into a more manageable frame. We would simply have to rescue this art form from neglect and decrepitude, and *storytelling* would save the world.

The death-and-resurrection story has given a liturgical and dramaturgical underpinning to every NAPPS activity. The ritual form of the storytelling festival evolved into an echo of the Mass, or a brush-arbor meeting (tents came later, by serendipity, but only clarified the form), the seder, or the Eleusinian Mysteries. We arrived already knowing in our hearts that our culture had fallen from grace. Somehow, sometime, we didn't know when, and it didn't much matter, we had sinned by denying our selves, our past, our heritage, the holy "something" that for lack of a more authoritative word for it, we would now call "Story."

If we didn't know that consciously when we arrived, the torrent of stories and exhortations about stories create a sense of cultic immersion, like the all-night chanting of the Mystery School, that immediately initiates us. The mythic pattern is read and enacted in the quickening of our souls. "The essence of life is . . . Storytelling. Storytelling languished in a land where the people worshipped idols. It descended into cultural oblivion. On the third day (in time for the Spiritual Storytelling!) it rose again, to return the world to Spring."

"Revival" is never about actual death — that story is too tragic and final. The key plot turn of a revival story is the revelation that death was only illusory, the result of our failed belief. No one believes that storytelling actually died, any more than the town of Jonesborough died. If they had, there'd be no town, no Festival, no story. These precious things are perceived as having been abandoned, turned from, denied, their values obscured by ignorance and neglect (which is sin). We're then invited to repent — gently, indirectly. We are, after all, most of us good middle-class late-20th-century adults, who would rather be caught *in flagrante delicto* than shouting and moaning on the mourners' bench. But by Sunday morning at the typical storytelling festival, we may have performed some of those same spiritual gymnastics.

The term "revival" is descriptive to me of the atmosphere of belief that infuses NAPPS events. We still go to the festivals, like folks go to tent meetings in the stubble-field on the outskirts of town, to get revived. In that sense, it's not the ancient art of storytelling, nor the little town of Jonesborough, that's died and come back to life — it's us.

Joseph Daniel Sobol is a storyteller, musician, and folklorist. He is writing a doctoral dissertation at Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., on the storytelling revival.

Passing It On

Sitting together in the other room,
My husband and grandmother talk.
What are they talking about, asks my mother.
Just the old days, the old stories.
We've heard them many times before.
Her 100 years being passed on.
Her stories slowly becoming ours over the years.
And so the talk goes on.
Ours about today, theirs about yesterday.
These days she spends her time in bed
Thinking about now and then.
She calls me throughout the day
To give advice about our daughter.
I can't sleep until I tell you this, she says.
And each time, I listen,
To how it was then
And how it is now.

— Joy D'Elia

*A mother and a musician, Joy D'Elia has had poems featured in **DirtRag** and **GreenPrints** magazines. She performs with the Homefolks Band, and with her husband as Skin and Bonz.*

Oral History and Artistic License

A Local Descendent Investigates a Family Story Recounted by a Local Colorist

Jan Barnett heard from her father the story of his great-great-grandfather's rescue of some travelers lost on Bald Mountain in East Tennessee. Later she found an article in an 1858 edition of ***Harper's Magazine*** *about the incident. In trying to sort out how the stories were passed down and which version was accurate, Barnett found that a story reflects the times in which it is told and the values of the people who do the telling.*

Tumbling Creek, by moonlight, from the 1858 edition of *Harper's Magazine*.

This is how my father, Ovlen Willis, told the story about our ancestor, Kan Foster, helping out some travelers lost on Bald Mountain in the Spivey section of Unicoi County, Tenn.:

"These fellers was traveling through this country. I don't know what they's doing, but they was traveling through this country. Anyhow they was another man that led them to the top of the Bald from the North Carolina side. And he turned them loose to come down this side. Well they got down in Tumbling Creek and night overtook them. So while they was blundering around in there on Tumbling Creek, why one of their horses got crippled. So they just tied up their horses, and somehow or another they come down Coffee Ridge Creek to a house and asked this Tilson feller about putting them up that night. And he told them he couldn't, that they's so poor that they just had one pumpkin inside the house to eat. And he said, 'if you'uns will go on down the creek here to Kan Foster's he'll put you up.' That he was a rich man. So they come on down to Kan Foster's. They told him what they wanted. He's a butchering two hogs. Had them on a table. So he put them up and sent his boys back that night to Tumbling Creek and got them horses and brought them out. And so they wrote the story then of Kan Foster."

It was like having a flashback to a previous life to sit there in the library reading about the people who were my forebears and to look at sketches of them.

I recorded my father telling this in the late 1970s when I took a class in regional dialectology at East Tennessee State University. Part of the class requirement was to elicit 20 minutes of speech from an informant who, in addition to being a lifelong resident of East Tennessee, must not have traveled extensively or have received much formal education. My father, the fifth generation

Jan Barnett

of his family to live in Unicoi County, met the requirements and loved to tell stories about life in the mountains. He had not been in the military and had earned a living by farming and logging until the early 1960s. After that he worked as a general laborer for Work Wear, Inc., in Erwin, Tenn., before his retirement in 1993. While at the factory, he was much sought after by the general manager, Jim Wells, and others as a guide for trips into the mountains of south Unicoi County, especially the Bald which lies between Tennessee and North Carolina.

Although many of my father's stories about the Bald were familiar, the tale about Kan Foster and the lost strangers was new to me. He told me the story when I showed him a postcard with a pencil sketch of Kan Foster on it which my grandfather had given me just before he died. The postcard was one of several printed and sent to Foster descendants by a neighbor, writer Ernest Seeman, in 1956. It had been on my grandfather David Willis's mantle for years, and I had always been fascinated with the wild, fierce-looking man sketched on the front. I remember asking my grandfather about Kan Foster, and he told me he was a great bear hunter and how he helped carry the old fellow to his grave on a birch bark stretcher. Granddaddy didn't know anything about the magazine the picture was supposed to have come from because he couldn't read.

During the interview for the dialectology class, I asked my father if he had ever seen the magazine Ernest Seeman referred to on the postcard. He said no, but he was aware that a written record about Kan Foster and the lost strangers did exist. He said Ernest Seeman had told my grandfather that he had gotten his information from Washington. I didn't know if Washington meant the Library of Congress, and neither did my father.

The postcard said David H. Strother, a famous writer and illustrator of the time, had made sketches of several of the Hensleys and Fosters living in the area when he and his companions made their way from the North Carolina side of the Bald Mountain down the Tennessee side. These pictures had been published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1858.

When I found the magazine mentioned on the postcard at the library at ETSU, I expected only pictures, but there was more. The article presented the same story my father had told, but in much more detail, and there was description of the female members of the family and the domestic scene in general. It was like having a flashback to a previous life to sit there in the library reading about the people who were my forebears and to look at sketches of them.

After reading the *Harper's* article, I asked my father if the oral version could have come from Ernest Seeman. My father's answer was an emphatic no. He said that his grandmother Elizabeth Tilson Willis was born in the 1850s and that "she knew them old people," and she told his father the story, and he passed it on to him, and that his Aunt Rodie and Grampa Willis also knew it. He said when Seeman told my grandfather that he had copied the picture from some literature out of Washington, that was the "first that anybody in the Willis family knew anything about the history of Kan Foster being written down anywhere."

I questioned my father carefully because the stories were so strikingly similar that it was hard to believe that his version hadn't come from the magazine account. There are only a few minor differences between my father's story and what Strother recorded. The written version says that a Chandler family was living at the first house where the travelers stopped and that they had a sack of corn and some pumpkins in the corner. My father says they were Tilsons and they had only one pumpkin. There is also some disagreement as to the rescue of the horses. The *Harper's* article relates that Kan Foster and his eldest

Kan Foster, from the original drawing in *Harper's Magazine*.

son left at dawn to find the horses rather than old Kan sending his boys back that night as my father says.

Although Strother, better known as Porte Crayon, is usually associated with Southern romanticism, the Kan Foster story has some of the flavor of the local color movement best represented by Mary Murfree and Bret Harte. It was through the writings of the local colorists that people of Northern cities learned about the Southern Appalachian mountains and received a romantic image of an idyllic rural life, very different from the growing industrial urban centers. This can be seen in Strother's description of the Foster family and their neighbors. The romantic element is also evident in his description of the wildness of the natural landscape.

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The article makes the travelers' adventures sound dangerous and dramatic. This was part of a journey Strother undertook for the "Winter in the South" series he did for *Harper's*. He and his companions were making their way to Jonesborough, Tenn., from Burnsville, N.C., but their guide left them on top of the mountain. Therefore they were left to find their way down its steep slopes. Strother wrote that they found themselves in such peril coming down the Tumbling Fork of the Bald that they feared for their lives. When they made their way to the Foster home, it was after "groping in utter darkness, along the brink of that savage torrent, periling life and limb at every movement, plunging waist deep into foaming pools, reeking with toil, while their outer garments were frozen hard as boards."

Kan Foster was described by Strother as a man "whose every motion betokened promptness, activity, and resolution in the highest degree. His features, though weather-beaten, were regularly handsome, partly covered with a short black and grizzled beard, and his black eye glittered like a hawk's." When they came up to the door of his cabin, he was skinning a wild hog. While his wife steadied the carcass by the hind legs, he was "holding a bloody hunting knife between his teeth, with arms bared and gory to the elbow, kneeling at the head of the slaughtered animal." For a magazine account, a colorful character like this would have to be the one to rescue the horses. It just makes for a better story.

It's easy to see why the oral version wouldn't be as concerned with presenting Kan Foster as the one to find the horses. The main emphasis of my father's story seems to be on his ancestor's economic status. I have heard him say many times that Kan Foster was "counted a rich man." His descendants all remember him as a man of means. He operated a mill and traded in goods from Jonesborough. Also, he was the largest landowner in that part of what is now south Unicoi County. With the continued depressed economic conditions in the mountains, it is more important to have an ancestor who was well off than one who performed great feats of physical courage which were simply part of surviving in that culture. Also, Kan Foster didn't go back to the Bald the way the travelers had descended. He took a more accessible route because he was familiar with the terrain from his bear hunting. Therefore his descendants wouldn't remember the rescue of the horses as that perilous. It was taken for granted that a bear hunter like Kan Foster was confident with the lay of the land.

Although generosity and neighborliness are very important to native East Tennesseans such as my father, his story doesn't seem to emphasize these traits in his ancestor. He says Kan Foster put the travelers up that night, but doesn't

Porte Crayon's portrait of Kan Foster's daughters, Nancy and Becky.

Porte Crayon's rendition of "Civilization."

elaborate, probably because like physical courage, it was simply a part of the culture. Strother was evidently impressed though, because he alluded to the generous character of his host several times with comments such as, "There was a free, frank, hearty hospitality, even in the expression of his face, that warmed like the glow of his blazing chimney." When the strangers told him they needed food and shelter, he said, "You are at home; the house and all that is in it is at your service."

Strother was also quite taken with the women in the family. In describing Kan's daughter Nancy, he said she was "slender and graceful as the spotted fawn, with a face whose regular beauty vied with the Greek ideal," and wondered "what a superb figure that she might make one day, if perchance, she were taken and educated in all the graces of civilization." When I was reading this, I was struck by the suggestion that my relatives of that generation were not considered as civilized as people in other parts of the country. But in fairness to Strother, he did have his older companion, whom he calls Squire Broadacre, chide him over the comment by asking if he meant, "Hoops, the polka, and point lace."

Squire Broadacre continued his comments in regard to Strother's supercilious remarks about civilizing Nancy Foster by pointing out the impeccable hospitality of Kan's wife and eldest daughter, Mary. He said, "Have you observed our good hostess here, how she hurries to and fro, bringing out her stores of dried pumpkin shavings, prepared corn, maple sugar, and sweetmeats — how she bakes, boils, and stews — striving, with all grace and cheerfulness, to do honor to her husband's guests? Have you marked how tidy she keeps her handsome brood — all clad in home-made of her own weaving, fashioned and patched with her own hand? Or the elder daughter, diligent and meek, how smilingly she skips to do her mother's bidding — to fetch dried apples from the loft — to keep the coffee pot from boiling over — to help off with the big kettle — and between times to lull the little ones to sleep, or keep the wakeful out of mischief? Those who have learned so well to perform the duties of daughter, wife, and mother, I say, have been well educated, whether their dwelling is the brown-stone palace that rears its carved front on the Fifth Avenue, or the mud-chinked cottage that nestles under the magnificent shadow of the Black Dome."

Another one of the travelers replied, "Bless the women! They're a comfortable institution, any where or under any circumstances."

These sentiments, though anathema to a 20th-century woman such as myself, would not have offended my female ancestors. They were meant as compliments.

Strother also said of Mary Foster that she "might have served Raphael as a model for another Madonna and Child." Since it is through this daughter that I am descended from Kan Foster, I tried to find out more about her. One of my aunts had a negative made from an old locket

The sketch of Mary Foster from Strother's 1858 *Harper's Magazine* story.

The locket photograph the author was told was her ancestor, Mary Foster.

picture which was supposed to be Mary and her husband David Willis. The enlarged picture of the two faces reveals a young man with pubescent chin whiskers and a fierce-looking woman who surely couldn't have been the sweet-faced girl in Strother's sketch. But my aunt said that was the real Mary. I decided Strother must have used quite a bit of artistic license. It went right along with all those comments about Mary's domesticity and meekness and women being a comfortable institution. In the photo, my grandmother didn't look like a Madonna. She looked like she was one generation removed from a Cherokee warrior.

There was such a discrepancy between the two pictures, I started asking other Foster descendants if they had any photographs of Mary. In the course of this, I discovered a picture of two of Kan Foster's sons, both holding pistols and dressed in Civil War uniforms, and the face and the hair of the one called Kennedy Foster Jr. was exactly the same as my photo of the person I thought was my great-great-grandmother Mary. What I had thought was a round collar on her dress was the collar of a military jacket. To date no other pictures of Mary Foster have materialized. The female ancestor I thought was fierce could have been docile and sweet, but considering the actual pictures of her brothers and the sketch of her father, I suspect there was a certain wildness in her face not captured by Porte Crayon's pen. Also, some descendants claim that Mary's mother was part Cherokee, although this is not mentioned in the Harper's article.

Finding a story carried down orally through generations that closely matched a written version which only recently came to the attention of the family is not surprising to folklorist Jean Haskell Speer, who is the director of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at ETSU. Oral histories are often found to be quite accurate, she says.

But neither the oral nor the written version gives me a real sense of something I'd like most to know: what was going on in the minds of the women? What did my foremothers think as they spent every waking moment tending home and children? My imagination can supply some of their satisfactions and dissatisfactions with their lives, but I would surely be reflecting my own generational values if I did. Neither my father nor anyone in his family has any stories about the women, while stories of Kan Foster's bear hunting abound. Since the women's story, except for Strother's romantic, pastoral version, is not available orally, imagination will have to suffice. I still think of Mary Foster with a fierce and rather wild expression on her face. That is my artistic license, and it is the heritage I have claimed.

. . . I was struck by the suggestion that my relatives of that generation were not considered as civilized as people in other parts of the country.

*Jan Barnett is a lifelong resident of Unicoi County, Tenn. Her work has appeared in **Now and Then** and **Appalachian Heritage**. She is working on a collection of short stories.*

The March Flood

I saw a sad sight just the other day
As I was going outside to play.
There was a flood, it caused me to quiver.
I saw a pig floating down the river.
I got in my boat to chase that pig.
Soon he was stuck under Georgetown Bridge.
I got a stick to move away the trash
And under a rock I found lots of cash.
I bought the pig with the money from the pebble
And moved him above sea level.

— Carter Hendrickson

Carter Hendrickson is a 13-year-old from Harlan County, Ky. His poem won first place in the fifth grade entries of the Spring-On-The-Cloverlick Poetry Contest at the University of Kentucky Southeast Community College.

Merrymaking and Murder: Contrasting Tales of the Bald

My father, Ovlen Willis, tells many stories of the Bald, the mountain straddling Unicoi County in Tennessee and Yancey and Madison Counties in North Carolina. This mountain, unlike most of the other peaks in the region, is a natural bald covered by thick grass rather than forest. In the 1930s and 40s, families on both sides of the Bald grazed their cattle in the meadows on top and paid the owner 50 cents a month for the privilege. The old cattle trail from the Coffee Ridge community in south Unicoi County can still be traveled. There are no roads going across the Bald, but it is possible to take a vehicle up to the top from Blue Mountain Resort on the North Carolina side (though permission is needed). The Bald can also be reached from Spivey Gap in Unicoi County via the Appalachian Trail (the more than 2,000-mile footpath from Maine to Georgia) which traverses the mountain. Whether one cheats by driving through the resort or hikes one of the trails, there are panoramic views of East Tennessee and Western North Carolina awaiting them on either side of the 5,516-foot-high summit.

On a recent Sunday afternoon hike with my father up the old cattle trail, he began to reminisce. He told me he and his relatives and friends had traveled up there to hunt squirrel and other small game and that at times they would just sit and enjoy the sunset and look at the settlements below. Sometimes they came for all-night fox hunts. I asked if they used tents. My father laughed and said they slept on the ground and covered up with a jacket if they had one.

Ovlen Willis at 14, taken in the Willis Cove in the Spivey section of Unicoi County.

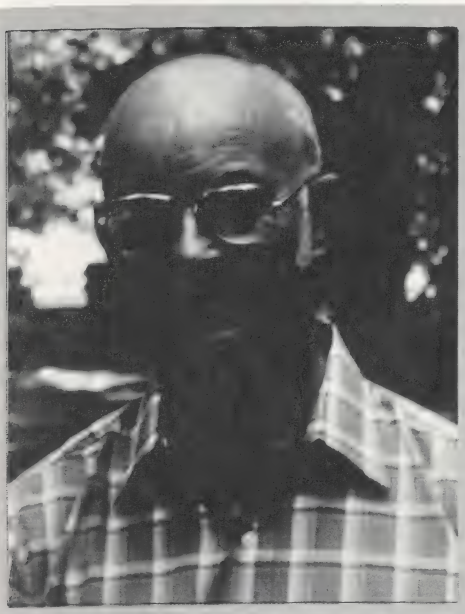
He told about the parties they had down at a spot known as the Double Springs. The Buck family, who owned the Bald during the 1930s and 40s, had a caretaker's cabin there. This was the spot where the music making and the drinking took place. He said it was nothing uncommon for men to be sipping from gallon vinegar jugs of moonshine made at a still just around from the springs. There was also plenty of shooting and whooping and hollering and dancing after the fiddles warmed up. It was here that they could express the wild uproarious side of their natures which couldn't be expressed in the hard work of planting steep hillsides or the fire and brimstone of fundamentalist religion. I asked him if the law ever showed up at any of these wild times on the mountain. He said, "Are you kidding? Why, they wouldn't have walked all the way up here for nothing." To his knowledge, no killing or anything really bad ever happened during the frolics at the Double Springs

Not only was the law absent when the men pulled the plug on their pent-up emotions, the women weren't there either. According to my father, the only time he ever saw any females on the Bald was on Sundays when they walked up with their families for a picnic or to enjoy the view.

But if women didn't play a part in my father's stories of merrymaking on the Bald, one woman certainly played a leading role in the most gruesome tale he tells. This is the story of Troy Tilson and Mary Edwards, a married woman Tilson murdered. He had killed her after killing her brother-in-law, Garfield Hensley, in the woods over in the Coffee Ridge community. The incident took place in 1942 at the John Pate Cave on the northwest slope of the mountain.

It is in such contrast to the good times my father talks about having on the Bald that it reminds me of the energy of the old Greek god Dionysus, who represents ecstasy and joy on the one hand and madness and violence on the other. The murder even involved dismemberment, a theme often associated with the dark side of Dionysus. Lurid details of the event still circulate in Unicoi county because of the spectators who packed the courthouse during the trial. Newspaper accounts only hinted at some of the more sensational aspects of the murder, probably because such reporting would have been against small town mores during the 1940s.

My father's version of the story matches that told by other residents who were living in the area. In the narrative, when he says "Troy made a date with Mary to meet Garfield," he



Ovlen Willis

means Mary Edwards was supposed to meet Garfield Hensley for a romantic encounter. The story, according to him, is that "Times were hard and Garfield Hensley had went to Oregon. He had worked out there one summer, and he saved $300 dollars. He come back and showed that money to one person and another. Well, Troy got a hold of it. So he made a date with Mary Edwards to meet Garfield around at the Price place.

'Well anyhow, instead of Mary being there, Troy was there behind a stump with a 16-gauge shotgun. And when Garfield come up, he shot him in the back of the head here and just poofed his eyeballs out, and he got the money out of Garfield's pocket. There was two dogs Garfield had. Troy left them and Garfield there. Them dogs kept everything fit off Garfield till they found him.

"Well, Troy come then and he got Mary, and they decided to go to North Carolina. They started up the Set Ridge to a place up there called the John Pate Cave on Coffee Ridge on that side of the Bald. Anyhow Mary got to that and that's as far as she'd go 'cause she was pregnant. Well, he knowed he'd better not leave her because she knew all about him killing Garfield. So he just knocked her in the head with his shotgun and he cut her all to pieces. He put her guts in an old holler stump, and he put her arms and legs and everything he could cut apart in a crevice in the rocks. He took her completely apart at the John Pate Cave which is about halfway between Coffee Ridge and the top of the Big Bald.

"And she was pregnant, so he kept the little baby, and he cut her secrets out, and he put all that in a cigar box. So then she had given him some kind of a disease. What do they call it? Gonorrhea or something like that. Anyhow it was getting the best of him.

"Carl McInturff was the high sheriff. They knew he (Tilson) had done it 'cause he was scouting, you know, hiding out someplace so they wouldn't find him. That showed he killed them right there. Finally he got so bad from that disease, he come to his house and told his wife to tell Carl McInturff to come get him and not bring no gun or there'd be a killing. So Carl went and got him. Well, he give Carl that box, and they had his trial down here in the courthouse. They had that box in there in the courthouse during the trial, and it had that little baby in there with her secrets. They give him 15 years for killing Mary and 99 years for killing Garfield. He was laughing all the time."

Troy Tilson is said to have admitted to two other murders after being sentenced for killing Garfield and Edwards. It is alleged that he said he choked Zeke Gillis to death and knocked his uncle Dee Sams in the head with a hammer and set the house on fire to hide the evidence. But he was not tried for either of these murders.

After serving several years in the state penitentiary, he was paroled and moved back to his old homeplace on Coffee Ridge. He lived there until the house caught fire, and he was burned to death. Evidently he was fairly quiet after getting out of prison because there don't seem to be any stories circulating about those years. But the stories about how he murdered Mary Edwards up on the Bald and cut her body into pieces continue.

—Jan Barnett

Up On Green Mountain

Up on Green Mountain
everyone knew the rumor. Eight foot tall red-eyed monster
with wings
snatched a farmer's dog one night
when he went outside to investigate a suspicious noise.
Faithful dog ahead
as always, farmer claimed he saw it off yonder
hunkered under scrub, eyes glowing like a controlled brush fire. Said
it looked right at him then walked off. (Never mind the wings.) He called:
Come on, boy. Four Legs? Where are you?
Back up the house he dug out the old Eveready,
foraged through a pitch black.
Scared? Was he!
Damn best huntin' dog a man ever had.

— Melinda S. Szafran

Melinda S. Szafran lives in Menlo Park, Calif. She says that this poem comes from "an actual rumor" that circulated around her hometown of Keyser, W.Va., during her childhood.

LET THE FIRE FALL

by Sandy Crimmins

My uncle made the whole family nervous until he went on his first vacation a few years ago.

The family'd get together Saturdays, not all of us every week, but a bunch, and the uncles'd get themselves introduced to a couple of beers after dinner and sit around the fireplace and watch a couple of kids wrestling on the floor until, occasionally, they came to some kind of collective agreement that it was time for the uncle who lived through the Battle of the Bulge and the uncle who was in a coma for four days after landing at Dunkirk to tell their stories. We all listened, but my Uncle Hugh would listen with as much intensity as the little kids that were hearing it for the first time. It made the other uncles so nervous to have him listen like that, that for the 45 years between World War II and when he went on vacation, a tense silence would fall on the men at the end of their stories. They'd drink their beer and watch the fire and listen to the distant sounds of their wives in the kitchen and wonder if tonight would be the night Hugh would tell his story. He never did, but they knew he could, and they didn't like that.

They'd drink their beer and watch the fire and listen to the distant sounds of their wives in the kitchen and wonder if tonight would be the night Hugh would tell his story.

Since his vacation though, Hugh would be guaranteed to let the silence settle just so far before he would lurch upright in his chair and bellow "Let the fire fall." This always caught Uncle Con off guard, since he had usually fallen asleep during the boring parts of Uncle Dennis' description of food at the Vet's hospital where he recovered, but he really got our attention.

"You have to imagine you're sitting around a campfire out in the wilderness at the base of a 10,000 foot mountain. The air is clean, the stars are shining and you're tired and at peace after a good day's sight-seeing. The mountain has a million Christmas trees marching up to that timberline thing. What a sight."

And if Aunt Freyda happened to be in the room, he'd always, every time, stop at this point in the story and mention that he was lucky enough to have been sitting next to the most beautiful woman in the world, his wife. I guess he had never noticed that she looked sort of like a toad, what with having brownish green skin (olive she called it) and kind of buggy eyes. Poor Aunt Freyda. She was different from us — real different. She was, my mother said, a rocking-chair sitter. And that was all the description my mother needed — it said everything about Aunt Freyda's differentness, her personality, her education, her religion, the money she and her family smuggled out of Germany in the 1930s. You see, the women in my family never sat in rocking chairs, they leaned against sinks or sat on hard kitchen chairs to discuss double coupons and difficult labors. Aunt Freyda, that childless, educated, European Jew rocking-chair sitter, couldn't have been any more different than she was. It wasn't possible. But don't get me wrong, we had gotten used to her and we knew she had things, ideas really, that we didn't. We had the family, but Freyda was our link to the outside world.

Uncle Hugh would wait for Aunt Freyda to smile and nod once (we were multiple nodders) in acknowledgment of his compliment and begin to rock again before he would continue his story, surprising any uncles who had drifted away into alcohol-colorized memories.

"It's a shiny kind of dark there on the mountain. They don't have street lights or 7-Elevens to brighten things up. They don't have TV either, so the guides would sit around the campfire telling stories about Indians and old-timers and trying to tame the land and laying railroad tracks. They'd tell stories about all the work these men did clearing timber, but the land didn't look like any people had ever been there before, except to build the cabins we were in. And the big lodge, of course. But there were trees and a big stream and clear sky. We forget here what a sky can look like — we're too used to ugly. After an hour or so of storytelling, while the fire was dying down, one of the guides started telling the story of the

miners who had worked that mountain for some stuff called molybdenum. These guys had a real problem with transportation, railroads being difficult in the mountains and all, so they decided to do some smelting on top of the mountain so they'd have a lighter load. They did this for a while, smelting and carting the stuff away. One summer there was a drought, and everything around was dry and the fire got out of control. By this time, we could see a fire, a real fire, burning way up on the mountain. It was a big one, too."

Now, the first time my Uncle Hugh told this story, he really caught us up. All the little kids were leaning forward with big eyes and the men at the table stopped the card game and the women stood in the door to the kitchen to listen. This was a new story, not one whose familiar rhythms and phrases rolled along. We had to concentrate to learn this new story, the same way we had learned all the uncle stories.

You see, we were a storytelling family, it was both our entertainment and our glue. It was the background music of our gatherings. We were storytellers because we were good at it and because we weren't good with secrets — we liked to know what was going on with each other. Actually, that's not quite right. We didn't want to know everything, just that portion of the truth that wasn't too scary. That's why it was great that my Uncle Hugh finally had a story to tell. Now we could relax. Now we didn't have to fear that he would make us listen to his war story. We couldn't have survived that story, we didn't know how he did. I guess the dreams helped.

He didn't warn Freyda about the dreams before they got married. In fact, the dreams stopped when they first started sharing a bed, as if Hugh was soothed by Freyda's warm body. But that only lasted a month or two before he had the worst time ever — six straight nights of dreams. The first dream Freyda witnessed was a real bad one. She woke up being sucker-punched by a husband who's eyes were wide open, even though there was no person behind those eyes, no one who knew who she was, or what she was doing there. It was too late in the dream for Hugh to know Freyda, or even for Hugh to know Hugh.

When she looked in the mirror the next morning and saw the black eye he had given her, it froze her so deep and so hard that the only thing she could think to do was to try to protect herself from harm and make nice. She must keep this thing hidden. What else could be done with a husband who beat you in the night?

After many nights of the dreams, she began to fear her husband so much she came to my mother for help. My mother had no help to offer, but hoped that my father would. He had none, so he went to his brother, who also had none. But Uncle Con, as some sort of unelected family patriarch, went to Uncle Hugh, who said "Why doesn't she wake me up?" So we all learned of my Uncle Hugh's dreams.

With some practice Freyda learned how to spot the dreams coming. She'd feel something long before a dream would start, maybe something as minute as a tension in the air or an especially deep shiver that would move across the bed from Hugh and she'd wake up. She'd whisper her special night incantation, "Please Hugh, Please Hugh, Please Hugh," and draw him away from the dream world before he got hurt.

For years she kept him safe from the dreams, but then she got sick. Her cancer took up everybody's attention — the doctors and surgeons came and went and we brought flowers to the hospital and fed Hugh and cleaned house. When they let Freyda go home, she was skinny and had no energy for a long time, which is why my uncle decided to start waking himself up. He wanted her to get better, to sleep deeply and wake up unworried about him. So he stopped sleeping between the hours of 2 a.m. and 4 a.m. when the dreams came most often. He would set his alarm and get up and read his books and watch over Freyda. Anything to avoid nights filled with clawing people whose eyes held a fear so deep it had no end. Anything to avoid dreaming about what it had been like to be a 19-year-old private at the end of WW II whose duty it was to open the camps.

Aunt Freyda recovered from her cancer and Uncle Hugh decided it was time to stop and smell whatever roses he found interesting, so he took her out west where they heard the story about how the fire on the mountain got out of control one night. The fire got so bad the miners thought their shacks and tents would burn and the mine entrances, which were shored up with wood, would collapse, burying friends underground. The foreman decided they should shove the burning smelter over the side of the mountain, letting it go down and away from the camp, even though it would waste weeks of work.

When my uncle got to that part of the story he would pretend to be the guide. He would call out, hand to mouth, head tilted back " 'Let the fire fall, let the fire fall.' " Then he would look around, check for what effect he was having, which was usually considerable on the youngest members. He would continue, "Some other guides who had climbed back up the mountain would hear this and send their fire down. We could see it trace its way down the mountain just like it did that first time, and it was so beautiful. Choked you right up, thinking about what people would do for friends, and about how a good foreman will be with the workers in times of real trouble. Made me feel right with the world."

So this was how my uncle stopped making us so nervous. We were relieved. We liked this story, and we were glad he had a story he could tell us again and again so we could relax and not worry that one night he would step over a line somewhere, have a beer too many and maybe feel a pressure too great, and tell a remembrance too nasty for us. We felt so much safer now.

Sandy Crimmins is a fiction writer living in Philadelphia, Pa.

". . .winter nails us in between hearth & dark corners where already our stories grow too dark to tell"

-Jeff Daniel Marion
"Winter Watch"

by Robert Morgan

Vance-Carson Duel

It was something in the air you could feel soon as we drove into the Davis Place. There was a line of wagons loaded down with corn pulled up in front of the big cribs but almost nobody was talking. It was like a smell in the air that made people hold back. You could tell it from the way the slaves seemed to step furtively from one building to another hoping not to be noticed. It was like an arena had been cleared for action and nobody wanted to call attention to theirselves.

"Why's it so quiet?" I said to Pa.

"Hush up," he said.

The wagon in front had moved and we creaked forward. The Davis Place had put out word they would be corned that day, and everybody on the creek had come with a load to settle debts and maybe get a little extra cash. In November with the corn just gathered they could buy it cheaper, and besides, it was the height of the stock driving season. It took us all morning to shuck and shell that many sacks. We left our corn in the shuck until it was needed. Pa said the ears stayed fresher that way. It would be near daydown before we got our sacks unloaded in the big crib.

Ever notice how danger in the air will communicate itself to everybody at once? Don't nothing have to be said. I saw Jerry Davis and Little Alfred standing by the stock pen, and I told Pa I wanted to run over and talk to them.

"You get back to help unload," Pa said.

I ran between the wagons hoping nobody would notice. The horses was nervous from standing there so long, and they kept lifting their tails to one side and dropping fresh golden apples. I stepped careful through the yard.

"Why's it so quiet?" I said to Jerry.

"It's getting near sundown," Jerry said. I could see it was nigh the pink of the evening same as he could.

"Everything's still like it was going to storm," I said. "Cept the sky's clear."

"It's sign of the times," Little Alfred said, drawing in the dirt with his toe. His feet were wrapped in rags except for the toes. Little Alfred was a slave, but he played all the time with Jerry. They were friends except Little Alfred had to do what Jerry told him to do. Little Alfred sounded like he was quoting somebody grown up.

"They's going to come signs and wonders," Little Alfred said.

"What wonders?" I said.

Little Alfred looked at Jerry. Jerry looked serious as a soldier before a battle, his face slightly dirty from eating molasses candy. He bowed his head and looked out toward the horizon.

"Them fellers are going to fight it out," he said.

"What fellers?" I said.

"Them politicians from Asheville. They're staying in the house tonight."

"How you know they're going to fight?" I said.

"We heard them talking," Little Alfred said. "They's going to be a fight at daybust."

"Each man has got two seconds," Jerry said. "And they've got Davy Crockett as referee."

"That ain't so," I said.

"Come see," Jerry said.

The drovers was beginning to arrive on the Turnpike with their hogs and cattle now. In front of one bunch of hogs a boy walked scattering corn to draw them into one of the pens. Behind the hogs come a long herd of cattle. Men cracked their whips along side the cows and called "Hi, hi."

The Davis house was a big brick house. It was the biggest house this side of Flat Rock. I always thought it must have a thousand windows, though it couldn't have been more than a dozen in front. We slipped around by the benches and tubs of the wash place, and by the ash hopper where they made lye. Things was busy in the kitchen so we slid into the side door. You could smell bread cooking and some kind of meat frying.

Jerry paused and put his finger to his lips. We tiptoed into the dark hallway and stood outside a closed door. Jerry stooped to look through a keyhole.

"What they doing?" Little Alfred whispered.

Jerry pushed him away and kept looking through the keyhole. My eyes were not used to the dark and I could hardly see them.

Voices were audible inside the room, but I couldn't make out many words. I heard clearly the words "assurance" and "sequence" and "schedule." My brogans felt heavy on the polished floor.

Finally I pushed Little Alfred aside and looked through the keyhole myself. At first I couldn't distinguish what it was I saw. Then I recognized a table with ink and paper on it. And a heavy red-faced man bent into view writing something.

"Then it is all agreed," a voice said. "We meet at sunrise at the state line."

"Agreed," some other voices said.

"And the weapon of choice will be a pistol, a brace of pistols each, loaded by seconds."

"No, one pistol each."

"Agreed."

"In an affair of honor it is customary... " the first voice said. But I did not hear the rest because Jerry pushed me away. I was not used to being pushed so I shoved back, and Jerry's elbow banged the door.

"What was that?" a voice inside said. But we did not hear anymore for we were running out the door and across the yard to the stock pens and the cribs. Pa was already unloading the sacks of corn in the late sun.

"I told you to come back in time," he said. But he didn't say anything else as we hoisted the rest of the sacks up to the crib door. On the way home he stopped by the river and stripped a hickory and whipped me for disobeying him.

Whether because of the whipping, or just curiosity, I determined that night as I laid in the loft that I would get to the state line at daylight and see what kind of fight was going to take place. We'd heard about the terrible quarrel that broke out between Vance and Carson during the election that fall. And I'd heard about duels before. I knew fancy gentlemen from town got into fusses, and instead of fighting with their fists like other people, made arrangements to fight in a secret place with swords or pistols. It was illegal in North Carolina. That's why they were crossing into South Carolina at daybust.

It was thrilling to think of grown men fighting with pistols. I think Pa and the other grown-ups knew what was going on, but they didn't talk about it to us kids, either because it was against the law or because it was dangerous, a matter of life and death. They didn't want any part of it. It was a quarrel between rich people from town. It was bloody politics, and ordinary people didn't want no part of it.

Jerry hadn't even told me exactly where it was to take place, but I figured it had to be near Saluda Gap, where the Turnpike swung down to The Winding Stairs. I'd leave before daylight to be sure to find it in time.

The whole night I was too excited to sleep. My legs was sore from the whipping and my hands raw from shucking and shelling the wagonload of corn. I kept dreaming about the two men facing each other with pistols raised, and I wondered where I could hide and not be in danger from flying bullets. Rain hit the roof above, sounding like shot come to lodge in the cedar wood.

It was a quarrel between rich people from town. It was bloody politics and ordinary people didn't want no part of it.

Being late fall, the days were getting shorter and daybust later every time. I'd have to get there before it was light or they would see me. And I'd have to slip out quiet, or Pa would catch me and give me another hickory.

I listened to the clock on the mantel downstairs, and when it struck four, I raised off the tick quiet as I could and slid my britches on. My little brother John was still asleep in the other tick, and I paused to see if he had woke. If he put up a fuss I would be caught.

Feeling for the rungs of the ladder with my insteps I clumb down. Granny was asleep in the room where the fireplace was, and if she woke and saw me, she didn't say nothing. She maybe thought I was going out to pee, though John and me usually peed out the back attic window.

When I eased open the door, I stumbled over something and almost tripped. But it was only the cat anxious to get back in where it was dry. The porch floor groaned as I tiptoed across and down to the yard.

The rain had stopped, but it was true dark. There was one tiny patch in the sky with stars. And as my eyes adjusted, I could see fog on the mountain across the river like some ghost haunting the top of the ridge. It was that moment after rain before the wind has started to blow off cold. The waterfall on the swollen creek was loud. As I found my way along the trail at the edge of the barn I heard a dove somewhere in the thicket. It was supposed to be bad luck to hear a dove in the dark, and the sound made me shudder.

I knowed the path to the river and down along the bank. But even so, I stumbled on a root and fell, scratching my knees. The cold sand made my hands hurt where it bit into the palms. My pants was already wet from hitting brush. But I found my way along the trail and through the birches around the shoals. Whitewater always made me terrified, like it was saying something, maybe a warning. And I was worried about finding the footlog, and when I found it, I had to feel my way across it.

Uncle Abram had run a cable across the stream as something to hold to above the log. And it was the rusty cable I found first, where it was guyed behind the big river birch. The cable was cold and wet in my hands, but following its taut length, hand over hand, I inched my way across the log. The river was up a foot or two, and the current seemed to be reaching for the log. I could feel spray on my ankles running into my shoes. Water snapped like a cold mouth at my feet.

When I finally got across, I turned south toward the Davis Place. Wet laurels hung over the trail and hit my face. But I wouldn't slow down. Not knowing exactly where the duel was to be I had to get there early.

My hope was to see it all and get back home in time for milking and feeding the stock before Pa ever knowed I was gone. If the fight was over quick, and I run all the way back I might avoid another whipping. Pa was handy with his hickory those days. But if it come to that, I'd just take the whipping.

The trail led up the hill past the laurel thickets and then wound above the branch hollow straight to the Davis Place. I jumped off the path when it got close to the house. You could hear people stirring there, and somebody turning a coffee mill. And lanterns moved around the stockpens. Candles shined in some of the second story windows.

I cut out through the woods above the Turnpike. My britches were completely wet now and limbs kept slapping my face. From time to time I stopped to rub the tears from my eyes and listen for travelers on the road below. But the Pike seemed deserted in the dark.

When I finally come out at the state line, it was just getting light enough to see the ground. There was nobody in sight. The gap there splits off three ways: one down into Chestnut Springs where the Pike goes, one north to the Davis Place, and one west to the head of the creek. The Revis pasture comes right up to the gap, and the pasture is full of cedars. I thought somebody might be standing behind one of the cedars, and I walked around the edge of the pasture but saw nobody. Was I too early, or too late?

There was hoofbeats, and in the gray light a horse and rider trotted out of the shadows and continued down the Pike until they disappeared into South Carolina. Was that a sheriff?

It occurred to me I had misunderstood what we heard through the keyhole. Or maybe Jerry and Little Alfred had tricked me some way? The sky was getting lighter in the east. I could see my hands and feet.

Was the duel further down in South Carolina where the rider had gone? Had it been postponed? Had it already took place? I would have to head for home before long to do the milking. There was a light on far down the valley where the Revis cabin was, straight below the morning star. The breeze was picking up on the slope above.

Then I heard a voice up there. It was not a shout but a fragment, just one or two words as though carried by a downdraft. I listened, straining with my ears, and thought I could hear lower voices up there.

The ridge south of the gap was covered with poplars and I crept quickly and quietly through the fallen leaves on the slope. Luckily the leaves were wet. There was a little clearing at the top of the rise. People thought it had been made by Indians, but it was too small to be called an Old Field. Mostly it was bare red clay with little patches of broomsedge and a sunken grave or two that must have been left there by the earliest settlers.

When I got near the top, I stooped down and crawled to the edge of the clearing, stabbing my sore knees on some catbriars. There were seven horses tied to trees, and it was light enough to see men standing in the center of the patch. Two of the men did not wear jackets, and their white shirts glowed in the pink light from the east.

Something dropped around me. I thought it was dew or rotten berries, or maybe bird droppings. But one hit my ear and felt hard as a rock. I turned and saw Jerry in the brush behind me. And Little Alfred was just behind him. Jerry put his finger to his lips and rolled his eyes and jerked his head to the left. We crawled around the edge of the clearing away from the horses to where a clutch of cedars stood. Careful to align ourselves behind the bushes we crept out within a hundred feet of the men in the open.

"Then it is agreed, gentlemen?" the man in the black coat said. He had long dark hair that fell to his shoulders.

"It is not agreed," said one of the coatless men.

"The sun will rise in a very few minutes," the long-haired man said. "We must decide quickly, unless you want to call the whole thing off."

"By no means," the other coatless man said. He was the shorter man, and his face was very red, as though he had been up all night drinking.

"Then what shall it be?" the man in the black coat said. "A pistol in each hand to be fired alternately?"

"I am left handed," the tall man said.

There was a conference between the four other men and the referee. They opened a chest and took out a flask. Each man poured a cupful and drank it off.

"I can't see," Little Alfred whispered.

"Can too," Jerry said.

"Can't see nothing," Little Alfred said, and dropped to his knees where he could look around the base of the cedar.

"Is that Davy Crockett?" I said, meaning the long-haired man.

"I reckon it is," Jerry whispered.

The men in conference seemed to solve their dilemma because they walked back to the coatless men and offered them each a dram from the flask.

"Then it will be one pistol in either hand," the long-haired man said.

All agreed. Each of the coatless men pulled a letter from his trousers and gave it to the referee. I could smell the brandy on the wind they were so close.

The referee took a fancy box from the chest and opened it. He held the box out to the men as though offering each a cigar. The men took out the pistols.

The longhaired man pointed to a spot and motioned for them to stand there back to back. The sun had just cleared the horizon and its orange light flushed the clearing. The broomsedge looked red as the clay. As the men stood back to back I saw we were almost in the line of fire.

He's coming right at us," Jerry whispered.

The tall man was facing us, the long pistol held down at his side. It seemed he was looking right toward me, and I thought sure he would see us peeking around the sides of the cedar bush. Would he holler at us, aim the pistol at us? My hands froze to the twigs of the cedar.

But I don't think he seen us at all. With

Robert Morgan grew up less than a mile from the site of the duel between Samuel Price Carson and Robert Brank Vance that occurred November 5, 1827. He said he heard the tale often and was particularly interested in the story as a boy because Davy Crockett was supposedly present.

Morgan said he wanted to use the story as he remembered it. "In writing the story I relied entirely on memory without doing any special research, making up a young character who was a witness," he said. "In the process I changed the story in small ways but got it essentially true to the historical version. But then that is the way storytelling works; a narrative changes slightly every time it is told. I wanted to get the slaves in the story, because they were there, even though they were not mentioned in the historical accounts."

The site was actually a popular dueling ground long before Robert Vance was carried away from the bloodstained meadow to die the next day from Carson's bullet. Since 1802, North Carolina law forbade challenges to, acceptance of, aiding or abetting any duel in the state. So, the "gentlemen" of Buncombe and Henderson counties, N.C., made use of the secluded mountaintop meadow just over the Henderson County line, in South Carolina.

In fact, according to Frank Fitzsimmons' *From the Banks of the Oklawaha*, published in 1976, the final challenges were rerouted by mail from Carson's address in

Pleasant Garden, N.C., to Jonesborough, Tenn., and then to Vance in Buncombe County, N.C.; all to circumvent the law prohibiting sending a challenge within North Carolina. Fitzsimmons described the two politicians as former friends caught up in an escalating tangle of derisive speeches and caustic insults.

According to Michael Hill, a researcher at the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, the hostilities stemmed from the congressional race of 1825 when 26-year-old Carson unseated incumbent Vance. Vance challenged Carson for the seat in 1827, and again was defeated in a public battle of mutual mudslinging. The two traded shots to each other's character from the podium for months before they arranged a duel to trade actual bullets.

Although many accounts of the fatal confrontation have been published over the years, Hill said, nearly all of them are based on the memoir of Silas McDowell, written four years before his death in 1879 at the age of 84. That account has an interesting postscript: McDowell wrote he never saw Carson sober again after the duel and that it was the specter of Vance's dying visage that drove him to drink.

The old dueling ground is called Vance Hill to this day, and it can be found on United States Geological Survey maps as Vance Mountain.

by Martin Edwards

the sun coming up behind us over Callahan, the edge of the woods was in shadows. And besides, he had other things on his mind than spotting boys behind the cedar bush. We could have stood out in the open and nobody would have noticed us right then. But we didn't know that. We were caught in the line of fire and thought we couldn't move without being caught. And we couldn't stay without the risk of being shot.

The truth is, I was too panicked to do anything except watch the two men in their fluttering white shirts, and think this is what it's like to be going to die.

For years I had laid awake at night wondering how I was going to die someday and how would I know I'd go to heaven and not burn in that lake of fire. I'd heard Pa talk about the unpardonable sin, and I'd heard the preacher talk about sanctification and justification. But I didn't think I'd ever have sanctification. I saw heaven as a place with lots of pine trees and meadows, and people standing around clear springs and singing all the time. And all your friends would be there. But if I got killed at that minute I didn't think I'd go to heaven. My feet turned to ice.

"One, two, three," the referee shouted.

The men took three steps away from each other, the tall man coming straight toward us, the big pistol held down and shining in the new light. The short man limped as he walked.

"Wait," one of the other men called, and ran to the referee.

"Halt," the referee hollered, and the men in shirt sleeves stopped about five or six yards apart.

"It is most irregular to interrupt a procedure underway," the referee said. "I must protest, Mr. Patton."

"Mr. Burgin and I have made one further agreement," the second said. "And I think it is for the benefit of all."

"What is that?" the referee said.

"We have agreed that if one is wounded the other will ride to get a doctor. That way the wounded will not be stranded with only his seconds."

"Very well," the referee said. "But I would be capable of performing that service myself."

"We thought it an additional precaution," Mr. Patton said. "In case you were required to leave in haste." He looked around as though he was afraid the sheriff would ride out of the trees.

"Then that's settled," the referee said. The two shirt-sleeved men returned to the starting place and stood back to back. The short man was shaking so his pistol shivered in the copper light.

"Lord have mercy," Little Alfred whispered.

I knew I should run back to the woods and get away, but I couldn't make my feet move. My hands were clamped to the cedar limbs and my legs was froze. It was like that moment in a nightmare when you're stranded and can't scream or move. If we hadn't been so terrified and hypnotized we could have backed away and run.

"One, two, three," the referee shouted. The men took steps, pausing a little after each, not like in regular walking where one step follows another. The short man was crippled somehow. It was like they were in no hurry to get to the end of the walk and turn around. Every step seemed to get slower. The tall man's face shined with sweat.

"Four, five, six," the referee shouted. The tails of the referee's coat rippled in the wind. The man facing us held his pistol down and looked straight at us. It was like he seen us and was going after us. The other men separated and followed their men several yards away, moving parallel to the duelists.

"Jesus, save my soul," Jerry whispered. I was too scared to talk but that's what I would have said too had I been able.

"Seven, eight, nine," the referee said, his voice not loud as before. He looked around as though expecting someone to intervene, to come to the rescue. The sun was on his face now and his skin looked like bronze. He looked like a statue in the middle of the patch, his arm raised high.

"Ten," he hollered, and dropped his arm. The two men turned slowly, as though they dreaded facing each other. The short man held his pistol pointing straight up and began to lower it. The tall man held his pistol down and began to raise it. As they moved their pistols to eye level I felt I was going to explode. The pistol of the short man was aimed straight at us, with the tall man in between. But I couldn't make myself jump away. Before I heard a shot I think I squeezed my eyes shut.

Something stung like a hornet through the cedar tree and I felt a bump of air on

my cheek like a whip had popped next to it. Then we heard the shots echoing off the trees. The men did not fire at the same time exactly. The shots and echoes went "baboom, ba-boom."

"Oh Jesus, oh Jesus," Little Alfred moaned and grabbed his shoulder.

"You ain't hit," Jerry said to him.

They crawled back to the trees, but I stood watching the men out in the broomsedge. The short man had dropped his pistol and was holding his chest. Blood poked like worms through his fingers and spread on his shirt. The tall man stood back watching, pointing his pistol at the ground.

The short man dropped to his knees, still holding his chest. His face was white as his shirt. Mr. Patton ran to him and held the flask to his lips. But even as he drank, the wounded man collapsed into the broomsedge. The blood darkening his shirt and hands was the awfullest thing I'd ever seen.

I had stepped out from behind the cedar to watch, but if the men saw me they didn't pay any notice.

"Mr. Carson," the referee called, and pointed to the tethered horse. The tall man gave one of his seconds the pistol and ran to his mount.

The referee took up the coat from beside the box and carried it to the short man where he lay. The five men stood over him talking, and from time to time tried to force the flask into his mouth.

"Oh god, I need to pray," the wounded man said several times.

Three of the men picked up the wounded man with great effort and carried him to where the horses were tied. But they did not try to put him up on a horse. Instead they laid him on the ground beside the trees.

I run back into the brush where Jerry and Little Alfred waited.

"Little Alfred wet hisself," Jerry said.

"I did not!" Little Alfred said. "That's dew where I laid on the grass."

There was a wet spot on the front of his trousers.

"You got a red place on your cheek," Jerry said to me.

I touched the skin over my cheekbone. It was hot and swollen a little, like the welt from a hickory, where the bullet had brushed past.

"Ain't nothing," I said, "but a limb slapped me."

We sneaked around through the sassafras and poplars to where the men were.

"You're going to be fine," they kept saying to the wounded man. But I don't think he could hear them. The coat covered the blood but his face was white as paper.

Pretty soon we heard a wagon coming up the trail. It was Col. Davis's wagon, drove by Little Alfred's pappy. The tall man was nowhere to be seen, and when I looked, the referee and Carson's two seconds was gone too. Two men followed the wagon on horseback, and I seen one was Dr. Johns, but the other I didn't recognize at first.

The referee took a fancy box from the chest and opened it. He held the box out to the men as though offering each a cigar. The men took out the pistols.

The doctor dismounted and knelt over the wounded man. The seconds stood back and gave him room. He lifted the coat and shook his head.

"It's a gut wound," the doc said. "He's losing blood fast." He tore a strip off the wounded man's shirt and tied it around his belly.

The other man got off his horse and stood over the wounded one. I recognized then it was Sheriff McCall. The sheriff turned aside and spit his tobacco juice on the grass. "This is bad business," he said.

"This is South Carolina," Dr. Johns said.

"Bad business," the sheriff repeated, and took off his hat to smooth his hair in the hard wind.

They lifted the hurt man onto the wagon and started back down the trail in a short procession. The seconds gathered up the chest and pistols and coats.

"We'll follow them to the house," Jerry said. "I hope they don't put him in my bedroom."

"Let's hurry," Little Alfred said.

But I had seen enough. And besides, it was milking time, or past milking time. I had forgot all about the time. The sun must have been up for 15 or 20 minutes. As I left I noticed a shiny spot on the ground where the wounded man had laid. It looked like the place where you had stuck a pig to bleed after it was shot.

The trail seemed different as I started back, stiff from excitement and fear. It was clumsy, running through the laurels, not knowing what I would tell Pa, wondering if the wounded man was going to die. The peacefulness of the river, and the birches along the banks, down out of the wind, seemed all wrong after what I had witnessed. But everything was still there, in its place, the footlog and worn path by the fishing hole, the rocks in the shoals with driftwood and trash caught on them.

By the time I turned up the trail to the pasture and barn, I decided I'd tell Pa I went out early to check my rabbit gums. My gums from the winter before was still scattered among the pines above the river, and I needed to bait and reset them. My face had been hit by a hickory limb. Pa might believe me. Chickens scratched in the yard between the stack of tops and the manure pile. It was windy on the higher ground. Smoke jerked from the chimney where ma must be boiling water for grits. I was glad to be back whether Pa believed me or not.

Robert Morgan, a professor of English at Cornell University, is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, and in 1991 received the James G. Hanes Poetry Prize and the North Carolina Literature Award. ***The Mountains Won't Remember Us****, published by Peachtree Press, is his latest book of stories.*

NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

ANNOUNCES

THE APPALACHIAN WRITING CONTEST

FICTION		POETRY	
First Place	$500	First place	$500
Second Place	$250	Second Place	$250
Third Place	$100	Third Place	$100

Contest Rules

- Submit no more than three poems of 32 lines or less each ***or*** one short story of no more than 3,000 words.
- Work must be original and may not have been previously published or have won a prize previously.
- Any style, form, or subject is permitted, but all entries must pertain to Appalachia in some way.
- All manuscripts should be typed and double spaced. Good-quality dot matrix print is acceptable.
- For each poem or story, include a separate cover page with name, address, phone number, title of the piece, and a few lines about the author (to use for a contributor's note if the piece is selected). The first page of each entry should also include the title, but the writer's name should not appear on the entry itself.
- The entrance fee is a one year membership in the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services ($10), which includes three issues of *Now and Then*. Those who already have a membership paid through December 1994 need no further entry fee (though if one is included, membership will be extended for an additional year).
- Entries must be postmarked by March 1, 1994. Please note if center membership has been paid previously. Manuscripts *will not* be returned.
- The competition will be judged by the editors of *Now and Then* and by independent finals judges, noted Appalachian writers whose identity will be announced when the awards are made.
- Center for Appalachian Studies and Services staff are not eligible to enter this contest.
- Winning entries and honorable mentions will be published in the summer 1994 issue of *Now and Then* (as space allows).

Now and Then, The Appalachian Magazine published by the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University, welcomes submissions and queries if they pertain to the theme issues and focus on the Appalachian region. Special *Now and Then* issues coming up: Center for Appalachian Studies and Services 10th Anniversary - Summer 1994 (copy deadline: March 1, 1994), Celebrations in Appalachia - Fall 1994 (copy deadline: July 1, 1994). Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for writer's guidelines.

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The **Center for Appalachian Studies and Services** was established in 1984 as one of 14 Centers of Excellence in Tennessee colleges and universities. It is a hub of scholarly, educational, public service, and artistic projects addressing the needs and interests of the Appalachian region. To counter the narrow, stereotypical views of the region, the center stresses the diversity, richness, and complexity of life here — in educational, economic, and political systems; in health, culture, and the arts.

Along with *Now and Then*, the center publishes the *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association*, an annual compilation of scholarly papers from among those presented at the Appalachian Studies Conference.

Affiliated with the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services are the **Archives of Appalachia** and the **Reece Museum.**

°**Archives of Appalachia** holds approximately five million manuscripts, a large collection of photographs, an oral history and folklore collection, and a special collection of regional books and other publications.

°**Reece Museum** houses artifacts related to the Southern Appalachians, as well as contemporary fine arts, folk arts, and crafts. Exhibitions and arts outreach programs for children, college students, and the public contribute to a better understanding of Appalachia's culture and to an appreciation of art.

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Donald Davis, Storyteller

by Joy Jones

I showed up in the auditorium eager to relive a chapter of my childhood that I thought was gone forever — the enchantment of listening to stories. It hadn't happened for me since I grew too big to sit cuddled up in my daddy's lap. But the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C., was sponsoring a storytelling concert for adults, and I was eager for it to begin. I scanned the program. There was a Native American storyteller, an African American, a Hispanic and an Appalachian teller. Indian folklore — I always enjoy that. African American — since I'm a black woman myself, I knew I would relate easily to that. Mexican tales, well, I hadn't ever heard any, so that should prove educational. But Appalachian stories? I prepared myself to tolerate what I thought would be unsophisticated yarns about the country.

I prepared myself to tolerate what I thought would be unsophisticated yarns about the country.

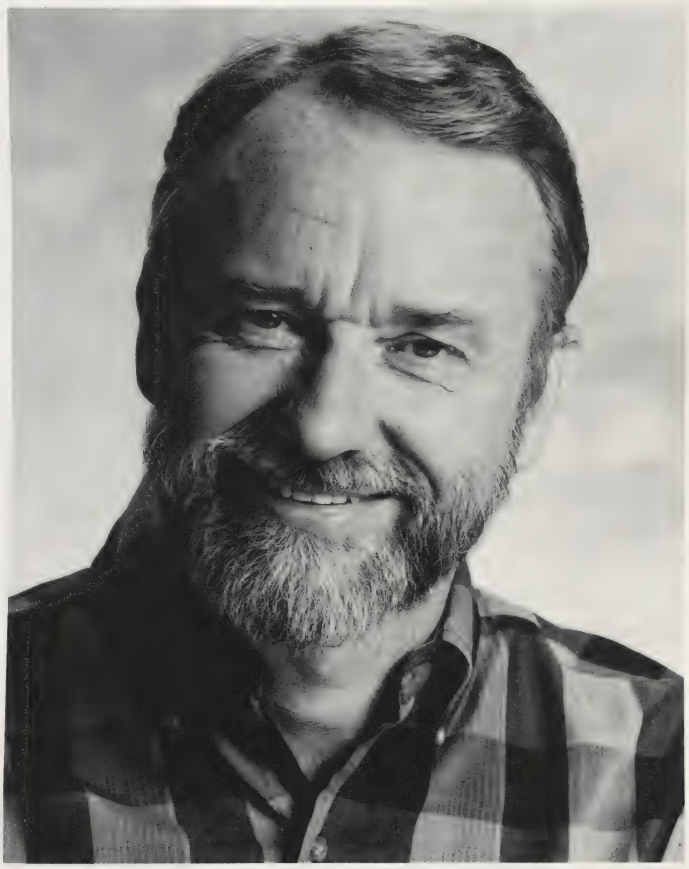
Imagine my surprise when I discovered that the stories told by Donald Davis, the Appalachian teller, were about me.

Donald Davis told about life in the fourth grade when he had Miss Daisy for his teacher. Miss Daisy was, as Davis puts it, a "teacher for life," a spinster and career teacher. As Davis recounted his experiences in Miss Daisy's classroom, he talked about the wonderful ability of a woman who had never been out of Haywood County, N.C., to excite her students about geography by using penny picture postcards collected from around the world. He introduced me to Lucious Moody Grasty, a classmate who had to get all his hair shaved off and his scalp doused with kerosene because he had head lice. Assignments were written down in a Blue Horse tablet.

In my inner city elementary classroom in Washington, D.C., we didn't write in Blue Horse tablets, we used hard-bound, black-and-white speckled notebooks. The boy in the third row who had to have his head shaved had ringworm, not lice. And my favorite teacher's name was Mrs. Hunting, a married woman, who wasn't big on geography but knew how to teach math.

Yet, as I sat and listened to Donald Davis' tales about fourth grade life, I found that although the externals were different, the essentials were the same. I found myself picturing the wooden cloakroom at my school, smelling chalk dust, and remembering teachers, friends, and school characters that had not come to memory in decades. "A lot of ethnic tellers miss by building their stories around what's different," said Davis when I spoke with him later. "I want my ethnic background to act as a setting, but I want the forefront of the story to be built out of the common experiences as a human no matter where they've been."

Davis' story world transfixed and transformed me with the same "ear magic" that bonded cave dwellers telling tales around the fire and which bonds parent and child in bedtime story rituals. Despite the convenient entertainment of television, film, or radio, a plain old story told by a good teller captures the mind,



Storyteller Donald Davis.

the imagination, and the soul in a far more profound way. "All of a sudden people began to discover that imagination is better than being shown all the pictures," said this veteran spinner of tales. "After a few generations of television... [it's great] to have the experience that in your own imagination you could be more creative and more individual than just having to accept the picture someone else hands you through television."

"After you finished talking about what you did, you talked about what people in the past did."

This storyteller is the descendant of people who have been telling stories on the same Southern Appalachian mountain land since 1781. Davis was born in Western North Carolina and continues to live in the state, now on the eastern side of Ocracoke Island. "I grew up in a world where language was oral — not written or broadcast," he said. "We had a once a week newspaper. We spent our time working and talking, talking and working. After you finished talking about what you did, you talked about what people in the past did." Young Davis heard folk and fairy tales, the many adventures about a simpleton named Jack, among other stories that had roots among his Scottish and Welsh forebears. Some stories were ancient and famous tales, others were the latest gossip. "By the time I got to college, I had already heard the Canterbury tales," he said. "Later on I had told enough stories that people would ask me to tell them [professionally]."

It was one relative in particular, Uncle Frank, who most influenced Donald Davis' development as a storyteller. Davis describes Uncle Frank as a man "who talked in stories." Neighbors, friends, and family members often said among themselves that "somebody ought to save those stories Uncle Frank told."

And so, over the last 20 years, Donald Davis has preserved stories about Appalachian values and characters, people and animals, and presented them to audiences all over America. He has told stories at the World's Fair and on National Public Radio. He is the former chairman of the board of directors for the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling in Jonesborough, Tenn.

Davis not only performs, but he also teaches storytelling and preaching workshops. For Donald Davis was a senior minister in the United Methodist Church before he retired and became a full-time storyteller. Preaching, after all, is often another form of storytelling. Like any other good story, a sermon should teach and inspire. Participants in Davis' preaching workshops examine biblical texts and compare them with real life experiences. He teaches them to "take old stories and give them new reality by making them *not* stories from long, long ago but by giving them [modern day] parallels." That process transforms a Sunday sermon into the living word instead of merely being a history report.

Whether in an urban or an Appalachian setting, storytelling is a powerful medium. It gives inspiration, brings back memories and shows how we are both alike and unique. As Davis puts it, storytelling "is not what I do for a living. It is how I do all that I do while I am living."

*Joy Jones is a free-lance writer whose work has appeared in the **Washington Post**, **Washington Times**, **Writer's Digest** and numerous regional publications.*

Elegy

My aunt told their story,
pointing while she drawled
to a hill of graves,
one blasted pine.

They were miners,
coal people, half starved
when they left black lung,
freezing shafts behind.

She did it too, ran
from played-out farms,
creeks with Indian names
to Chicago,
her first real winter.

They lost children,
one in three, she killed
her first to save
its life, twenty years
in the mill.

Some drifted west
as far as Texas,
and once she bought
a ticket, drank a fifth
of mezcal to prove she could.

These days, she laughed.
it was hard enough
to cross a field
of scrub grass,
stop here and remember.

Sometimes, out beyond
the twisted tree,
the last row of fading stones,
she saw different things:

a girl with a cardboard suitcase,
a sky filled with hope.

— William Miller

*William Miller is teaches English and creative writing at York College of Pennsylvania. He has two full-length collections of poetry, published in 1993: **Old Faith** (Mellen Poetry Press) and **Breathed On Glass** (Druid Press).*

Stephen Warren

The Vitality of Folklore

an interview with Judy P. Byers about the importance of folklore and about carrying on the work of folklorist Ruth Ann Musick

Judy P. Byers

Judy P. Byers, a native of Marion County, W.Va., is a folklorist, workshop director, English education consultant, and storyteller. She is professor of English and folk literature, and supervisor of English education at Fairmont State College, Fairmont, W.Va. As guest professor, she teaches creative dramatics for Lakeview Theatre's curriculum and instruction graduate program at West Virginia University. She has also taught storytelling and folklore at the Augusta Heritage Arts Workshop at Davis and Elkins College, Elkins, W.Va.

Byers received her undergraduate degree from Fairmont State College and her master's and doctoral degrees from West Virginia University. Her dissertation analyzed the folkloric-creative dramatics approach to the teaching of language arts. She has done postgraduate studies at the International Folklore Institute at Indiana University, Bloomington, and has observed educational dramatics throughout the English schools.

A large part of her life's work is devoted to carrying on the studies of the late Ruth Ann Musick, an Appalachian folklore scholar. Byers serves as folklore executrix of the unpublished folklore estate of Musick. She has contributed selections in ***Missing Chapters, Part II***; ***West Virginia Women***; ***Mountain Heritage***, ***Missouri Folklore***; and ***West Virginia Folklore Journal***.

Now & Then: Why are you especially interested in Appalachian folklore?

Byers: It's always been a part of my life. I'm a native of Fairmont, W.Va., and I am steeped in folklore because of my family background — although I do believe that everyone is steeped in folklore. Everyone has a personal folklore.

She never did ask my grandmother if she believed in ghosts or if she knew a ghost tale. She just let the family talk — and in the discussion, came the lore.

When I was just a little girl, Dr. Ruth Ann Musick came to my home to collect the stories of my family. She was looking for ethnic families. Since we were Italian with just a touch of Southern Irish, she found people who were natural storytellers. She started coming to my home when I was five years old, and she came for 11 and-a-half years. I would notice this lady sitting at the (dinner) table, and the tape recorder was just on in the corner. She never did ask my grandmother if she believed in ghosts or if she knew a ghost tale. She just let the family talk — and in the discussion, came the lore. At the end of those 11 and-a-half years, Dr. Musick had gleaned from my family — especially, my maternal grandmother — 400 ghost stories.

Now & Then: You worked extensively with Ruth Ann Musick, who was very much involved with Appalachian folklore — especially West Virginia ghost stories. Would you describe your work with Dr. Musick?

Byers: She began to show me her collection process when I was just a girl. There were times when she would go out and collect stories, and I had an opportunity to go with her. When I became a student at Fairmont State, she was already retired. She had retired early to devote her time to her folklore collection. But she came out of retirement to teach a narrative and descriptive writing class, and I was fortunate enough to take it. It really was a folklore collecting class. I saw the process that she used to encourage her students to become

collectors themselves. A lot of her folktales were given to her by her own student collectors, who she trained.

Another way she collected was with tape recorded interviews, going out among the people. Here her students, such as myself, were often her informants. Most of her students were children of coal miners and Appalachian hill farmers. Coming to Fairmont State, many of them were first-generation college-bound students who brought all this lore with them but didn't realize what they had, and she ex*cited* them to go back and talk to their parents, their grandparents, and other family members.

Photo courtesy of Pat Musick.

Ruth Ann Musick, circa 1950.

Now & Then: Why is it so important that these stories are preserved, that they are known to others?

Byers: It's important that we preserve the folklore of the people because the folklore of any region, the folklore of any group of people, is really a mirror, a way of looking at society at a certain time. For instance, here in the hills, we wouldn't have the ghost tales as prevalent as we do if it were not for the natural tragedies and coal mining disasters, plus the atmosphere and the topography. The pockets of ghost lore in Central Appalachia reveal that the people have been superstitious, or the people have traditionally had fears because, when people talk about the supernatural, they're talking about both fear and faith. If these miners and their children are telling stories of ghosts being sighted in the mines or ghosts around the portals of mines, they're talking about a ghost who usually returns to help, and the miners feel secure in telling that kind of story. The ghost becomes almost a guardian angel.

Here in the hills of Central Appalachia, these are the tales that Dr. Musick has collected. She's famous for the "regional legend," the regional ghost legend or "encounter story," in which ordinary people all of a sudden have an extraordinary experience, an encounter — not of the third kind — but an encounter of the ghostly kind. Many ghost tales are prevalent here in the hills because of our atmosphere, this patchy fog that oozes out of the valley, that hangs along the mountains. It's creepy. And, if you use your imagination, you can surmise a will-o'-the-wisp or an apparition. No wonder people talk about ghosts around here so much. They see it in the fog.

Now & Then: Is folklore only a thing of the past?

Byers: Certainly not. Folklore is constant. It's primal. Above all, it's personal. Everyone has a personal cultural knowledge of customs, traditions, and beliefs. And then the environment greatly influences personal culture.

Mountainous areas are ideal for customs and traditions, and yes, folklore is still going on here. A good example is the Farmington disaster of 1968. A lot of men were trapped — one was a very close friend of my dad. There were crows, 78 of them, that hovered around the portal. Then Consol [Consolidation Coal Company] came in and sealed the portal. Those crows have never left. Later, when the authorities opened the portal and took out more bodies after the methane receded, there were still some crows. I've seen the crows there. The crows and the catastrophe coming together were ripe for the genesis of a folktale, of a belief — and the belief which was transmitted orally was that the crows were the souls of the miners who were still trapped in the mine.

There will always be folklore because it is the mirror of the emotions and soul of the people. To understand the history and the economy of any group of people, you cannot divorce yourself from their traditions and beliefs. Folklore will always be with us.

It's important that we preserve the folklore of the people because the folklore of any region, the folklore of any group of people, is really a mirror, a way of looking at society at a certain time.

Now & Then: Why do you present folklore and storytelling programs at schools and libraries?

Byers: I really consider myself, first and foremost, an educator, a teacher. And then, of course, I am a trained folklorist, but my approach to folklore is an educational approach. We have to make the young, especially, aware of their culture, of their background. There's an old saying: "If you cannot embrace and love yourself in your home then you'll never be able to love anyone else or anything else anywhere else." That comes from my Italian grandmother who gave Dr. Musick so many stories. And so I really consider my life's work to be a mission to teach the young. I often use the mode of storytelling, an avocation and

a great hobby of mine, to spread the message of folklore.

My *big* project, which will encompass my sabbatical this academic year, is to analyze Dr. Musick's unpublished collections by disseminating, editing, modifying them. We'll have enough for six or seven more books. I promised her on her deathbed to complete her unfinished work. I found out she had cancer in early November of 1973, and she died July 2 of 1974. She had just about seven months. During that short time, she put her house in order. She plotted out how she wanted her work to be continued. She named me the executrix of her unpublished folklore estate, and also she asked me if I would continue her work. Her purpose was for public and educational programming and knowledge. I really feel, since it was her dying wish and I promised her, that she will haunt me (Byers laughs) unless I fulfill my promise.

Now & Then: Do particular themes run through Appalachian stories?

Byers: In Dr. Musick's collections, four of which have been published, most of the tales are ghost tales with the helpful spirit being the basic motif. Two other minor motifs are the revengeful ghost and the poltergeist. The ghost tales were the predominant stories that people told, both the Anglo-Celtic Germanic people and the Southern Europeans who came after. However, there is one collection — the third published collection, *Green Hills of Magic: West Virginia Folktales from Europe* — which I think is very important because it contains fantastic tales outside the supernatural realm. That's why, when it went out of print at the University [Press] of Kentucky, I begged and begged them to put it back in print. These stories have been brought over mainly by what I call the "ethnic" people, the people who came in the second big migration of people to the hills from all over southern Europe, such as the Italians and the people from the Slavic countries. They came mainly to work in the coal mines and on the railroads. They were lonely here. As I say in the foreword that I put in this new edition, they felt isolated from their homeland especially where they were placed in these coal camps. They wanted to remember back. They wanted to remember and go home, even if it was just in their minds, so they told the stories from their homeland.

Usually in Appalachia we have the Anglo-Celtic Germanic story, but we don't have the stories of these people. I love these stories, and I find now, as time goes on, that they are developing greater and greater significance. They deal with many motifs and themes such as unrequited love, suffering, sadness, fear. There are preternatural stories in this collection. "Preter" is below the natural — the vampires, the werewolves, the strange curses.

. . . I really consider my life's work to be a mission to teach the young. I often use the mode of storytelling, an avocation and a great hobby of mine, to spread the message of folklore.

Dr. Musick really didn't collect very many tall tales [that have been published], but she collected a lot of folk songs that I will work with, that have never been published. She has a wonderful, *big* childlore collection which I am soon going to have ready for publication. I'm calling it *An Appalachian Mother Goose: Childlore of West Virginia.* I'm very excited about it. She spent 20 years collecting, intermittently, the lore of children, by the children, and for the children. Mainly, as she interviewed adults, these kinds of childhood remembrances would be conjured forth.

Now & Then: In dealing with this folklore, what have been your most interesting findings?

Byers: One of the most wonderful things that happened involved a Polish-American family who wrote and later called me announcing that they had an opportunity to go back to Warsaw and see their family members. The communist government told them they could come in *only* if they could bring an artifact, a concrete example that the Polish family in America was considered prominent. Well, they knew that their grandfather had given Dr. Musick some stories that appeared in *Green Hills of Magic*, so [University Press of] Kentucky bound together in a special binding several of these books in hardback, and the family took them over. The folktale collections allowed them into Warsaw to see part of their family. That episode touched my heart very much. That, to me, was one of the most gratifying uses of folklore.

Now & Then: What folklore projects have you been involved with?

Byers: I put together seven storytelling tapes — along with my two colleagues, Noel Tenney and John Randolph — after we formed a storytelling and educational consulting troupe, called "The Hill Lorists." Six of these storytelling tapes we call "Lore of the Hills." They cover the gamut of folk literature, or oral literature, starting with "Verbal Lore." They continue with legend and myth, which I call "Greater than Real Life" — the ghosts, the ghastly, the strange, unusual witch story. We also look at the collecting process and how everyone is a storyteller. We continue with humor — and the humorous tales, the "tall tales." These audio tapes are being used in the classroom now around the state.

In my present sabbatical project, something wonderful is happening. People who had given Dr. Musick material are starting to contact me . They're usually not the [contributors] themselves. They're the grandchildren or distant relations of her actual informants, and they have offered to give me background information about the informants. I'm very interested in this information because I was trained under the school of folklore that the storyteller — the informant, who is the person who gives the lore to the folklorist — is just as important to collect as the actual tale itself. In fact, I am even going to run an ad in the paper, or a column that tells people how I'm progressing.

Now & Then: What would be your message to others who are interested in investigating Appalachian folklore?

Byers: The study of folklore sends a personal message to each person, which is "know your past." Know the stories of your family and your immediate environment. Capture the past, because to capture the past is to see more deeply into yourself. I lament the fact that, all around America, young people, students, will tell you they don't like history. They don't like social studies. They don't like geography. They find it all boring. They are bored because they don't see any personal connection to the content. If they could realize that their lives are personal history, really folklore is personal history, personal culture, then perhaps they'd sense the relationship of their individual lives to the great stories of all humanity.

Get to know what is right in your backyard, right on your front porch, right in your own home, and then expand from there. You don't need to collect among strangers. You can start within your environment. That's what Dr. Musick taught me; my environment was very rich. Most people have rich environments. Folklore helps a person to understand society. And then, if you want to go on and look at your community, that's wonderful. An extension of folklore is genealogy or the archives of a local history society. Let folklore become the prerequisite for all outer knowledge.

I see a big movement towards a romantic return to the commonplace. And that's what folklore can do. Folklore is really capturing the essence of the individual — and "homo sapiens" is exceedingly intriguing. There is such a thirst for this today. On television, from morning to night, there are more and more talk shows where people tell their most intimate secrets. It's as if people have to talk to express themselves, to almost recreate their human experience in the hopes that someone is listening: Storytelling. There is a storytelling renaissance movement in America, but beyond that, whether people realize or not they need to retell their personal stories to learn, to reach out, to survive. Storytelling is the process in which folklore is transmitted, and folklore is the essence of humankind.

I was trained under the school of folklore that the storyteller — the informant, who is the person who gives the lore to the folklorist — is just as important to collect as the actual tale itself.

Stephen Warren teaches composition and literature at Fairmont Sate College. He attended Carnegie-Mellon University, the University of Pittsburgh, and for a year studied at the University of Bath, England. He earned his bachelor's and master's degree at West Virginia University, where he is now in the doctoral program.

"Surely the truth about Southern Appalachia, its history and people, can be told better than it has been told. If the truth is told, it will be told in a story, and the story will be better than those which continue, wittingly or otherwise, the tradition of local color."

— **Jim Wayne Miller**, "The Kentucky (Re)Cycle" (a review of Robert Schenkkan's *The Kentucky Cycle*, controversial nine-play marathon, winner of the 1992 Pulitzer Prize for drama) in *Appalachian Heritage* (Spring 1993)

Ruth Ann Musick

Ruth Ann Musick was born September 17, 1897, in Kirksville, Mo., where her parents had a small farm on the outskirts of town. She earned a bachelor of science degree in education 1919 at Kirksville State Teacher's College. Her doctorate was in English with an emphasis upon creative writing from the University of Iowa in 1938. Musick accepted a teaching position at Fairmont State College in 1946 and began teaching a folklore class in 1948. In 1950, she revived the West Virginia Folklore Society, and in 1951 founded the *West Virginia Folklore Journal*. Musick served as editor and main writer until her retirement. She retired as professor of English from Fairmont State, May 1967. Musick died July 2, 1974.

Ruth Ann Musick's West Virginia folklore collections include *Ballads, Folk Songs, and Folktales From West Virginia* (1960): *The Telltale Lilac Bush, and Other West Virginia Ghost Tales* (1965); *Green Hills of Magic, West Virginia Folktales From Europe* (1970); and *Coffin Hollow and Other Ghost Tales* (1977).

"On campus and around town, she was a familiar figure who captivated those she met with her own blend of charm and idiosyncrasies. Walking outside, a common pastime and necessity, she could usually be seen dressed in a trench coat, boots (for her feet were always cold), and hat tied with a layered veil. On her route to and from college she would often carry two heavy valises, one balanced in each hand, stuffed with student essays, books, and folklore projects. Oblivious to the weight of her bags, she would step lightly, spryly down the steps or up the hill. Just a hint of a stoop in her profile could be noticed in later years. She was a small woman with clear ivory skin, twinkling grey-green eyes, and a laughing smile. Her closely cropped brown hair, slightly streaked with white, fluttered in the breeze, as if too were caught in the boundless energy and enthusiasm her whole body emitted. She talked as fast as she moved, in crisp, precise tones, greeting passersby."

— Judy Prozzillo Byers, *Missing Chapters II: West Virginia Women in History*, 1986.

Sharyn McCrumb's Ballad of the Beautiful Appalachian Death Sun

A witty, entertaining writer uses her Appalachian home as a backdrop to her novels as she genre-hops around popular styles

Jeffrey Marks

Sharyn McCrumb

The hard part about talking to Sharyn McCrumb is keeping up with her. Three of her books were published in one year, all to critical acclaim. ***MacPherson's Lament*** *was the latest entry in the Elizabeth MacPherson detective series and departed from her usual scenarios by featuring the adventures of the sleuth's brother and parents. The science fiction* ***Zombies of the Gene Pool*** *is the sequel to McCrumb's Edgar-winning* ***Bimbos of the Death Sun****.* ***The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter****, a novel in what she calls her "ballad series," was released in paperback and won the 1992 Best Appalachian Novel award from the Appalachian Writers Association. This* ***New York Times*** *notable book is the sequel to the* ***New York Times*** *notable book,* ***If Ever I Return Pretty Peggy-O****.*

A full-time writer, she is a former media librarian at Virginia Tech. She is married and has three children. They live in Shawsville, Va.

Having just finished a multi-state tour, McCrumb was recently signing books in Tennessee, the state where her "ballad series" is set. During the course of the interview, she signed books at two stores, lectured at Austin-Peay State University, spoke at a banquet, and did a radio interview. After a short rest at her home in western Virginia, she was on to Malice Domestic, a mystery convention, where she is a perennial favorite.

Now & Then How did you get started writing?

McCrumb: Since childhood, I've always known that I wanted to be a writer. Nothing else really appealed to me. When I was very young, I would write stories. Most of the writers I know are like this. Being an English lit major, I know that the Brontes, when they were young, wrote little books about

mythical islands in which you can see glimmers of their later characters. Nobody's juvenalia is publishable, not even theirs, but writing it does give one a chance to practice the mechanics of writing — how to conjugate a verb and where to put the commas. It's only after I was older that I really had something to say.

After I had written my first book, *Sick of Shadows*, I went to a writers' workshop. The man there who read my manuscript told me that I needed to get rid of the social commentary and add a detective with a drinking problem and a few more dead bodies. He didn't understand what I was trying to do, but yet he was trying to give me advice. What I did gain from the conference was the name of a writer who had an agent. The writer worked two buildings away from me on campus. I sent the manuscript to the agent and it sold without any changes to it. I hadn't really intended for Elizabeth to be a series. I was planning for a next book without her in it.

Now & Then You mentioned before that you had to wait until you had something to say. What is it?

McCrumb: I'm a social satirist. The first of my (mystery) series deals with assumed cultural identities. In *Highland Laddie Gone*, I did this with the Scottish festival that Elizabeth (MacPherson) attended. Here were all these people who had regular jobs during the week and came to the festival on the weekend dressed in wool kilts in the midst of summer, pretending to be Scottish. The way that I brought this out was to let the reader see this through the eyes of a real Scotsman who is astounded that people behave like this. As part of my research, I took a real Scot to a similar festival and just took notes on his reactions. His idea of Scottish music was Sheena Easton and Rod Stewart.

It used to be that people had a fixed social identity. You were born in an English village, and that defined you. Now when a high school class graduates, the students can become anything: a moral majority leader, a goatherder in Missouri, an MBA with a briefcase. Why do people make these choices? It has been said that this is the only thing we count upon, this area of identity that we have carved out for ourselves. Hence, it becomes a very good motive for murder. When someone threatens your entire persona, you kill to preserve that identity (as happens in the novel).

Now & Then After publishing the first four books in the Elizabeth MacPherson series, you started two different series. What caused you to do this?

It used to be that people had a fixed social identity. You were born in an English village and that defined you.

McCrumb: With *Bimbos*, it started out as a joke. There was a science fiction paper contest at the university, and as a joke I entered a piece with the title, *Bimbos of the Death Sun*. Needless to say, I didn't win, but the people in charge of the competition told me that the title was simply too good to waste. So I started to think of a way to use it. I thought it would be funny to have someone write a serious science fiction novel and have the publisher rename it *Bimbos*. So I did some research at small science fiction conventions and wrote the book. When I won the Edgar for it, I realized the joke was on me because for as long as I write, my books will carry the banner, "Author of *Bimbos of the Death Sun*."

With the ballad series (*Peggy-O, Hangman's*), it was a little different. I'm involved with Appalachian Studies at the university. I was tired of hearing the stereotypes of Appalachia, and so I decided to set a series in East Tennessee so that people could see the culture there and realize that it's not Bo Duke.

Unfortunately, Southern mountain culture is one of the few cultures that it is still okay to ridicule. With the first book, I wanted to show the town from a man's perspective. With *Hangman's*, I decided to show the same town from a woman's point of view.

It's also different for me in that usually the Elizabeth books come to me with the plot first. I have the idea for a murder trip or the old women selling their home to an unsuspecting buyer. With *Hangman's* though, the plot came to me in a series of images and ideas. I had a long session with a folklorist who helped me to come up with a unifying theme to the images that I wanted to include in the book and from there, I came up with the plot. It's a very different process.

Now & Then How did you come to be interested in Appalachian Studies?

McCrumb: My father's people are from East Tennessee, and I found that all the tales and memories of substance came from that side of the family. There is so much to be said — to be clarified — about that beautiful, but much misunderstood region. Poets like Jim Wayne Miller and James Still reawakened my love for that place.

I was tired of hearing the stereotypes of Appalachia, and so I decided to set a series in East Tennessee so that people could see the culture there and realize that it's not Bo Duke.

Now & Then This is frequently called the "Second Golden Age of Mystery," and you are frequently mentioned as one of the major writers in it. What do you think are the causes for this?

McCrumb: When Tony Hillerman accepted the Grandmaster's award, he thanked all the minimalist fiction writers for their writing. He said as long as

people write in the present tense about people we don't like not doing much, then mystery fiction would continue to prosper. I really think that we in the so-called genre fiction are the logical extension of the tradition of Dickens and Austen. In *Great Expectations*, the book opens with a scene of a convict and a little boy in a graveyard. If that isn't crime fiction, what is?

It annoys me when people think of mysteries as less than "literary" fiction. Every time someone excels in mystery they are promoted into mainstream fiction. If these people were left in the genre, you would see that some of the best books published today would be in category fiction. It's very arbitrary.

Now & Then There is a very different feel to each of your series. Do you find it difficult to keep the three series going?

McCrumb: Not at all. I enjoy doing the three separate series. I don't think I could do the 11 books I've done if they were all in one series. I find it to be a challenge. I like the opportunity to change moods and tell different stories.

The only thing that I find frustrating about the multiple series is that there doesn't seem to be a crossover. The people who like the Elizabeth books don't seem to like the ballad series and vice versa. The people who enjoy the more serious fiction don't read the social satire. I think perhaps that I should use a pen name so that the series could grow on their own.

Now & Then What are you working on now?

McCrumb: I'm taking a break at the moment. After writing four books in 17 months, I think I'm a little burned out. I have started another book in the ballad series, but I've written only a few scenes. I've also been giving some thought to a historical mystery. I touched upon that briefly in *MacPherson's Lament* dealing with Civil War gold, although the book was more to give readers an idea of how the South still feels about the war. I've also been thinking about a medical thriller in the Robin Cook vein. I like to try new things and challenge myself in my writing.

My father's people are from East Tennessee, and I found that all the tales and memories of substance came from that side of the family.

It's really difficult to write with all the publicity and promoting of your books. Just signing, answering fan mail, and giving interviews can be a full-time job. I think I could do that 40 hours a week, but that's not writing itself.

Now & Then How did you become interested in the Civil War?

McCrumb: The war is not over here, any more than it is in Ireland, Israel, or Bosnia. My great-grandfather fought in it, and with 655 battle sites in Virginia, it is a haunting presence.

I decided that I wanted to talk about the lingering effects of a war fought on one's home ground and to explain that the war is still feelings here, not cold facts in a history book.

Now & Then You've mentioned research several times during our discussion. Do you research your books and how much time does it take?

McCrumb: I do a great deal of research before I write a book. I take pride in getting the details right. The mystery readers of today are a very intelligent group, doctors and lawyers and scientists. When I was researching *Lovely in Her Bones*, I took a class in forensic anthropology. I received a letter from someone afterwards, complimenting me on my use of the discriminate function chart, telling me that I had used it correctly. The letter went on to say that he should know since he created it! Recently I attended a conference of forensic science in Boston.

Typically, I do research for one book while I'm working on another. I collect articles and other things and put them in a folder. It takes some time to come up with all the details for a book.

Now & Then Do you have any advice for writers trying to break into the market today?

McCrumb: I spend several weeks a year lecturing to people about writing and [also about] writing mysteries at workshops and in classrooms. Probably the best piece of advice I can give someone is to just write the book they want to tell me about. You can't find a Branwell Bronte book in the library because for all his talking about his ideas for a novel, he never sat down to write it. In all the time I've been lecturing though, only one person has actually been published. It's amazing, but I correspond with some of the others and there's always an excuse.

Beyond that, read what is currently being published in the genre today. When I lectured at East Tennessee State University, I asked if anyone had read a mystery by a female author, everyone raised their hands. They had all read Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers. When I asked who had read a book by a living female author, no one could respond.

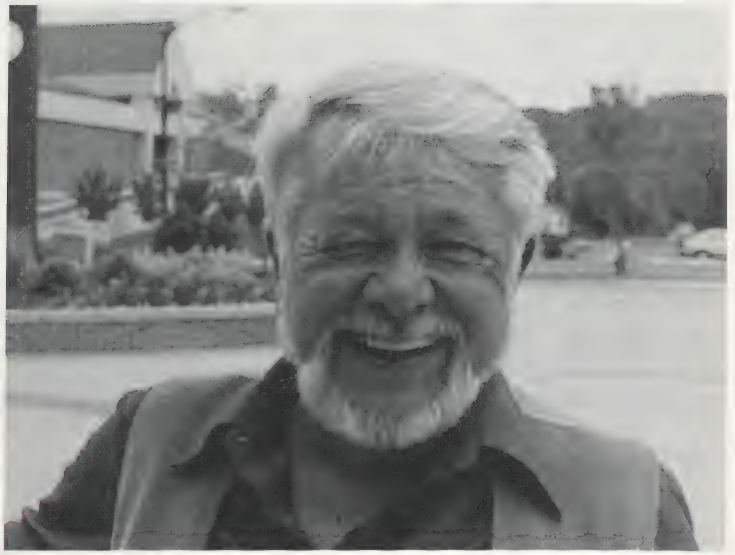
Jeffrey Marks lives in Cincinnati. This interview appeared in ***Over My Dead Body!*** *It is reprinted by permission.*

"Truth? Hell, woman, there ain't no such thing. All there is, is *stories."*

—from Robert Schenkkan's ***The Kentucky Cycle****, controversial nine-play marathon, winner of 1992 Pulitzer Prize for drama.*

Parks Lanier

Gary Carden: A Fish Trying Not to Drown



Gary Carden

Writer and teacher Gary Carden of Sylva, N.C., has in the past few years become a professional storyteller as well. He uses his family stories as a basis for his performances. Recently, Davenport Films released a video of him telling his story, "Blow the Tannery Whistle," (reviewed on page 47). This summer he was a featured guest at the annual conference of the Appalachian Writers Association at Radford University in Virginia. The organization's president Parks Lanier interviewed him there.

Now & Then: What is your storytelling tradition like?

Gary Carden: I grew up where stories were a family tradition. You heard people tell stories at family reunions, at weddings and funerals, especially funerals. When I was growing up, I heard stories that were poignant, pathetic, sad things. Generally the stories were a mixture of humor and pathos. I never have been real big on telling Jack Tales, or telling the old mountain stories that have been told and told and told.

I have long thought that stories are more than merely amusement. There is something in them that sustains people.

I have long thought that stories are more than merely amusement. There is something in them that sustains people.

At the risk of sounding spiritual, I think there is something psychological in many stories that gives you a sense of well-being, and you may not even be aware of it. It goes beyond humor, and to me, it seems I have discovered that personal stories, stories about my own family, can illustrate a moral precept, or an attitude toward life just as effectively as a Jack Tale, maybe more so, because it is personal.

Now & Then: The novelist John Gardner says that sometimes writers write from what he calls "a wounded moment." There is some crisis, some hardship in their lives that motivates them to be writers. What about storytellers? Are you telling stories out of a "wounded moment" such as the early death of your father or abandonment by your mother?

Carden: I don't think you can be an effective storyteller unless you do launch yourself from something. I have been fascinated by the concept that I have just run into recently, that physical health is a factor. Bad health. Not healthy, robust guys, but men and women who have undergone some physically debilitating illness, whether it is infantile paralysis, spinal trouble, or whatever. Something that has really knocked them out.

I have heard, as a matter of fact, that Ray Hicks, who is now in bad health and has been for about 10 years, is much more effective as a storyteller now. It is as though, for whatever reason, something that was weakening or debilitating in some way, enriched him as a storyteller.

Now & Then: What motivated you to make a storytelling video?

Carden: I've been telling stories for about 10 years, and I had one story called "Blow the Tannery Whistle." I made a little audio tape (of it) three years ago, but one of the things people said was, "Well, Gary, this is nice, but we need to *see* you tell the story." There is so much lost in that audio. It isn't just me that needs a videotape. Any storyteller worthy of the title should be seen as well as heard.

Now & Then: What is the state of storytelling now?

Carden: When I originally approached George Holt [head of the Folklife Division for the North Carolina Arts Council] about the tape, he told me that he thought genuine storytelling, the way

it was practiced in the mountains, was an endangered species. What was going on out there, especially in festivals and places like that, was some sort of strange . . . it's almost as if it has been processed down . . . . it's almost alien to what the original storytelling practice was.

Now & Then: Are organizations like our Appalachian Writers Association doing enough for storytellers?

Carden: No, but the fact that you are doing anything at all is wonderful. I think that generally (and I'm not at my best when I'm trying to be diplomatic), the literary reaction to storytellers is that "they are the illiterate art, to very sophisticated people, not well read. They could not write. That's why they resort primarily to speaking." Of course, I know that is not true.

I would jump off the trestle for a quarter. I would take an epileptic fit for a dime, and I would take it in the A&P.

I have a constant uphill fight with literary groups and writers' groups, trying to demonstrate to them that storytelling is an art form. And with me, the real irony is that most of my stories were in another format, either as poetry or drama or short story, before they became stories. The process was backwards, in that sense, from what is usually thought of. I tell "The Uktena" now, but it was originally a play. I tell "The Raindrop Waltz," and it was a play. I tell the story about my grandfather's brother who ended up in a mental institution; that was a poem. My stories were something else first, but what I need (and maybe this is a sellout) is immediate, instant gratification. I need to know immediately that what I did was good, and you can get that from storytelling. You don't get that mailing it to a magazine. I go home with a sense of accomplishment or gratification. It's very important to people like me.

There is always a common chord, always something that resonates. You can see it in audiences. And you feed off that in an audience when you see people responding. If they don't respond to you, it's almost like some psychic vampirism. You find yourself weakening, going the other way, becoming less effective. You need that feedback from the audience; the more you get it, the better you are.

I've gotten very interested in a Jungian analyst, Dr. Clarissa Estes, who tells stories to her patients. She has a book called *Women Who Run With the Wolves*. Marvelous lady. She has made about 15 storytelling tapes, and she has something to say about storytellers in general. She has one tape which explained so much that I hadn't understood about myself. She said that the best storytellers were what she called "the skinless people." Everything hurts. The wind blowing hurts. Rain hurts. Skinless people remember on their deathbed a slighting remark they heard when they were five years old. They are abandoned children, that's the way she puts it, and she says they are forever abandoned. She means that literally. They were neglected by their parents or they lost their parents, and of course I lost both my parents. When I was two years old, my father was shot, and my mother abandoned me to my Carden grandparents. She says if that happens to you before the age of four, you are an abandoned child for life. You have to be constantly reassured you have some value. You will go to any extreme to do that.

I started very early at school doing ridiculous things, just so people would look at me. And for the longest time, I mistook any kind of attention for valuing me, and many times they considered me bizarre. I would jump off the trestle for a quarter. I would take an epileptic fit for a dime, and I would take it in the A&P.

Now & Then: How do you interest strangers in your family stories?

Carden: Everybody seems to have had the common occurrence of putting a grandmother in a nursing home or having someone in the family die. When it gets down to it, the stories that are best are not necessarily "Appalachian," or that is of secondary importance. They strike that common chord.

Now & Then: What is characteristic of mountain storytelling?

Carden: Mountain people speak in metaphor. I wasn't aware of that for a long time. I think Cratis Williams is the first one who ever called that to my attention. He said, "You just notice it, Gary. You ask a mountain person something, particularly if it's something abstract about ethics or honor or justice or courage, he'll tell you a story, and that story will be filled with metaphor." And after that, I noticed that even if my relatives said something critical to me, they would do it in the form of a story.

Jan Davidson used to tell a marvelous story, and it was the same story I had heard from my Aunt Elsie, who was very critical of me because I went to college, and I shouldn't have gone. "Got the big head and went to school. Ought to be out there helping his granddaddy in that cornfield." Finally when she would speak to me years later, she came up to me and wanted me to know still how she felt. She just said, "Gary Neil, you ever heard the story about the little boy that caught a trout and took it home? He put it in the spring, fed it, and played with it. And that trout got to gettin' out, and it would lay out on the bank by him. Well, it would get back in the spring, and he would go into the house. One day, the trout got out of the spring and followed him into the house, slept with him, and went everywhere with him. The other kids had dogs and things, but this kid had a fish floppin' along behind him everywhere he went. It was embarrassing. He dreaded the first day of school. Everybody was going to stare at him when the fish followed him to school. Sure enough, it did. They were going along through the woods, and he walked across the footlog. That fish was floppin' along that footlog, and it flipped off that log and went into the creek and drowned."

My aunt said, "Gary Neil, don't forget where you come from."

Parks Lanier teaches English at Radford University.

CRACKLE-GLASS MARBLES

Gary Carden

I remember nights when I was a child; warm summer nights when I sat on the front porch with my grandmother while she shelled peas and snapped beans. Pinchie-bugs drummed on the window screens and rain crows mourned on Painter Knob. There would come a moment when my grandmother would turn to me and say, "Now, listen here. I took ye when nobody wanted ye. I raised ye. Now, ye owe me." And I would say, as I had said many times before, "What do I owe you, Momma." (I called her "Momma.") "Don't you *ever* let them put me in no nursing home," she would say.

Growing up in a time when "county homes" or "poor houses" were commonplace, my grandmother reacted to them like most mountain women. "Thet is where ye go when yore own family don't care enough about ye to take care of ye." When the county home was replaced by nursing homes, my grandmother saw little difference. "County home, nursing home, I don't care what ye call it. Same thing!" After my grandfather's death, her anxiety increased. Frequently, her sons would make awkward statements about "thet new nursing home at Balsam Gap" where every room had a color TV. My grandmother needed an ally in the coming fight, and I was elected. "I can stay right here," she assured me. "I want to set on my own porch and watch the Balsams fade in the twilight."

From the age of ten, I felt I was in training. My grandma fed me a steady diet of propaganda. Frequently, as we sat on the porch, she would rush into her bedroom and return with a big blue box. A Schrafft's candy box which contained the things my grandmother deemed valuable: the receipts on her burial insurance for the past fifty years; the two letters my grandfather had written her prior to their marriage (I had stolen one once, hid in the barn loft and opened it. It contained two sentences: "Hey, pretty woman! I'll see you Saturday."); a picture of an infant daughter who had been a "blue baby" who had died before she was two; and there in the bottom of the box, the "*Grit* Story." She had cut it from the *Grit*, and over the years I must have heard it read over one hundred times.

The story was about a sweet little granny lady who learned that her heartless daughter-in-law and her hen-pecked son were plotting to place the little granny lady in a nursing home.

"Oh, no, I don't want to go," my grandma would read as tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Hush, mother. There is no use talking," said the son. "We will be here tomorrow morning to take you to the nursing home."

After the son had departed, the granny lady knelt by her little bed and prayed. "Please, sweet Jesus! Don't let them put me in the nursing home." Then she turned out the light and got into her little bed. In the night, a great storm came. Lightning struck a great tree which fell on the house and killed the little granny lady. My grandmother thought this was a happy ending.

The next morning, the spineless son arrived to find his mother dead.

"They found her body crushed beneath the great tree," my grandmother entoned. "Clutched to her bosom was a picture of her son in his graduation gown, which prompted the son to say, 'Well, mother won't have to go to the nursing home after all!' "

Over the years, my grandmother told me an awesome number of horror stories about what had happened to hapless grannies in nursing homes. Starvation, embezzlement and poison were prominent themes. Each Sunday, we drove by the county home so my grandmother could see if anyone she knew was there. "Oh, My God! Thet is Esther Holland. Pore old thing. Thet worthless son of hers has a eight-room house."

And so it went while I was in college. Then, several years after I had graduated and began teaching in a small college, my Uncle Ardell called me. He don't like me because I got the "big head" by going to college when I ought to have been home hoeing corn. He called me "Professor" but it wasn't a compliment. "Well, Professor, Momma wanted me to call ye. I don't thank its any of yore business, but I promised I'd call and tell ye. We are putting her in the nursing home Monday."

I had been well trained. I immediately launched into a defense of my grandmother's desire to "stay on her own front porch." Ardell let me sputter to a stop, and said, "well Professor, I know I ain't as smart as you and all, but I'm doing what I thank is right — considering what is happening."

"What is happening?"

"Well, I'm sure the last time you wuz home, ye noticed them burns on Momma's arms." (He knew I hadn't been home in two years.)

"Burns?"

"Since she don't cook no more, she bought a hot-plate. Can't get the hang of it. Keeps burning herself. Last time I was in the

house, I seen green mold growing on her dishes. She washes them, but since she broke her glasses, she misses them. Then, after she fell in the chicken-lot . . ."

"When did this happen?"

"Month or two. Laid over there all night. I found her the next day. Little Doc Nichols said that if it had been ten degrees colder, she would have died."

Then, he went on to tell me about her sitting on the front porch talking to her dead sister. She rocked, dozed and forgot to eat. "So, she's going in the nursing home, Professor," said Ardell. "At least she will get good food three times a day. I think she has been living on Moon Pies and peppermint candy."

So, she went to the nursing home. The first time I visited her, she wouldn't speak. But, then, one Sunday, when I entered her room she said, "Come in John Lyndon." That was my father's name. "Set down. Arthur will be back in a minute." (My grandfather had been dead for twelve years.) "Albert is coming over with his new wife." (Albert had been dead seven years.)

We sat and talked about people who were long dead who were "coming by this afternoon." When Ardell showed up, she acted like he was a teenager who had his first job at the local tannery. When Little Doc Nichols made his rounds, taking her pulse and nodding when she said that "Arthur has gone to town," Ardell led him out in the hall.

"Doc, is my mother's mind gone?"

Little Doc laughed. "Yep. Her mind's gone to 1937!" Ardell looked bewildered. Then, Little Doc went on. "If ye mean, is she crazy, Ardell — no, she ain't. She is just as sane as you or me. But, she don't like it here." Little Doc sighed and shook his head. "They tell me she has run away twice. So, she is doing the only thing she can do. She has picked her a time when she was happy. As near as I can figure, that was a Sunday in June, 1937. Nobody was dead. Even that little baby, Ida Lee, was alive. She is gonna live that day over and over for the rest of her life."

Little Doc peered back into the room where Agnes sat, and said softly, "Sometimes, I come in the evening and she talks about hearing the cows coming in. Here she is in a nursing home built on an interstate, but she ain't here. She is home, surrounded by pasture. Hears the rooster crow in the morning. She is in the bosom of her family!"

So, we played the game, Ardell and I, talking of things past and passing. Then, one Sunday, when I arrived, she said, "Come in, Gary Neil." Not John Lyndon. We talked about the usual things. She had planned her funeral for the past ten years. "My burying dress is in the closet at the house," she said. "I want to be buried at Love's Chapel, 'n I want the Jamison quartet to come and sing thet song they sang at Arthur's funeral, "I Come to the Garden Alone."

"Yes, Momma."

When I rose to leave, she hesitated a moment and then crossed the room and hugged me. Scared me half to death. You see, my family ain't "huggers and kissers." I believe that was the first time that she ever hugged me in my life.

"What's that for," I said.

"Well, I thought I would go on."

"Go on where?"

"The other side," she said.

What can you do with a statement like that? I laughed and said, "Momma, I'll see you next Sunday."

She was in the hospital by Wednesday and she died before the week was out. She was buried at Love's Chapel. The preacher forgot her name. He was new, and didn't know her. But, the Jamisons came and sang, "He walks with me, and he talks with me; He tells me I am his own."

Several days after the funeral, the nursing home called and said that my grandmother had left some "personal effects." When I went up to get them, someone had been moved into her room. Her "personal effects" were hanging in a little Hefty garbage bag on the door knob. When I got to the car, I opened the bag: her glasses (one ear broken off); her false teeth (one tooth was nicked, so she always covered her mouth when she smiled); eight dimes tied in the corner of a handkerchief; and the picture of Ida Lee.

Several years later, I came home for a visit and drove by my Granny's old house. The windows were broken and vines crept across the porch. The front door stood open and the wind blew leaves through the house. I called Ardell and asked what he intended to do with the house.

"Well, Professor, I thought I would let the fire department burn it. They like to practice on old houses like that."

Several days later, I asked Ardell to sell me the old house.

"Never thought you had good sense," he said. "Now, you have proved it! Plumbing is gone. No heat. Electrical wiring is dangerous . . . But if you want to buy it, I'll sell it to you.

That is where I live now. Evenings, I sit in my granny's old rocker and watch the traffic. I sleep in her bedroom. There is a little hole in the window that I put there with my Red Ryder air rifle when I was seven. Found my cap pistol that I used to wear to the Saturday matinee in the canning house. One evening, I was spading up the garden and suddenly, there in the shovel was three blue crackle-glass marbles. Three marbles that I had lost when I was nine years old. While I was standing there with them in my hand, Ardell came by. He doesn't like me much, but he likes to come by and see what I am doing. Frequently, I say something that he can tell the rest of the family — something stupid. I showed him the marbles. That was a mistake.

"Lost them 50 years ago," I said.

"Uh-huh," he said.

"Amazing!" I said.

I can tell when Ardell is getting ready to give me my "comeuppance." He likes to make a fast getaway. So, when he abruptly turned and went to his truck, I followed. He got in, cranked the truck, put it in gear and rolled down the window.

"Professor," he said, "I don't care how long you live in this old house, or how long you set in Momma's old rocking chair," he let the clutch out, "you ain't ever GONNA FIND ALL YOUR MARBLES!"

And he was gone.

Time for me to set on the porch and watch the Balsams fade in the twilight.

Opening the Classroom Door

Storytelling gets an advanced degree

Storytelling is an art that can be learned, according to those in the master's degree program at East Tennessee State University. Here's how it works.

First: car, day of school, kiss, date, lovemaking, cigarette, job, pet, drink, bike, friend, home, performance, lie.

A class is gathering subjects from which to build stories. It is part of a storytelling institute, a three-day workshop led by professional storyteller David Holt, whose album, *Grandfather's Greatest Hits,* was nominated for a Grammy Award this year. The teacher has also appeared on the television program "Hee Haw" and performed with Kathy Mattea, Roy Acuff, Doc Watson, and at the storytelling festival in Jonesborough. Holt regularly teaches at the institutes, which are sponsored by the storytelling program at East Tennessee State University.

The four institutes per year provide a "concentrated period of time with a famous individual," explains Flora Joy who coordinates the master's degree program at ETSU. The institute's students, who come from all over the world, see performances and practice storytelling. Those in the master's program get credit for the course.

Does this program work? Can anyone learn to tell a story? A lot of people tell stories, Holt says, but few really know how. The most impaired are people who talk all the time. "They can't cut to the chase." It's quiet people who often have the best stories, he says. "I started out as a shy person. It's a way to express yourself."

But, yes, even the storytelling-impaired can learn to tell stories, he says. That is what the classes and institutes are all about. "They just have to find good material. They have to learn how to hone, they have to build toward some sort of climax." He recommends to the group that they look at the little events. The big, traumatic stories are rare in any person's life, but that doesn't mean a person's life is then bereft of stories, Holt says. "We think we don't have stories, but we have to look a little farther."

Like many who have come to storytelling, Holt is a zealous advocate. He was a musician who attended the storytelling festival in Jonesborough in 1976, and he was hooked. "I realized the power of telling stories." As an old-time banjo player he had already developed a love of the region, but was constrained by the medium. "With songs, you can hold them for maybe three minutes."

In the master's program there are teachers, librarians, ministers, homemakers, and, more recently, full-time professional storytellers. They come from 23 states, and this year, one is from Wales. Ninety-eight have enrolled in the program; 19 have graduated so far. Joy, who developed this first and only master's degree in storytelling in the world, says she is "flabbergasted" at the success of the five-year old program.

Jim Sledge

Flora Joy.

Apparently, it was an idea whose time had come.

Flora Joy began teaching reading and language arts in the school of education at ETSU almost 30 years ago. As a teacher who taught teachers, she would visit schools. When she told stories during these visits, she found "magic in the classroom." She echoes David Holt: "I could see the power of storytelling."

Jim Sledge

David Holt teaches at the Storytelling Institute, 1993.

Telling stories in the college classes was not an accepted method at that time, she says. "My first year teaching, I used storytelling, but I closed my door." Her students liked that part of the class especially well.

Eventually, she developed a class in storytelling. It was so popular, the depart added more classes.

Today, storytelling is an accepted teaching tool. It's used, Joy explains, in the "whole language concept" in teaching. "It's a current buzzword," she says, but it's effective. A storyteller uses it to teach lessons in many areas including

Pat Arnow

"articulation, oral language skills, pronunciation, diction, dialect" and how to build a story. "It's a life-coping lifetime skill."

Flora Joy comes from Elizabethton, a small town in East Tennessee. Her bachelor's degree was in English, speech, and drama, and she received a master's in English and linguistics from ETSU. Her doctorate is from University of Tennessee in curriculum and adult education and educational psychology.

The storytelling festival in nearby Jonesborough, which Joy started attending in 1975, "had a tremendous impact on my life. I realized what I was doing was legitimate. It gave me courage to open the door." She began to develop the program that eventually turned into the master's degree in storytelling.

It is a program particularly suited to teachers, because, Joy says, "Teachers are performers, too." Students may come to the master's program with any kind of undergraduate degree, since there is no storytelling major in any college.

Storytelling at ETSU is a program for practitioners, not theorists. Students take courses in basic and advanced storytelling and a practicum as well as linguistics of reading, psychology of reading, and research methods. The thesis can be a video of the student telling stories.

The program maintains a liaison with NAPPS, the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling, in Jonesborough, which sponsors the naitonal Storytelling Festival each year. The students work at the festival and are able to hear the stories. The students also gain experience with a program of Halloween stories for children with 10,000 participants. ETSU also has taken over the institutes from NAPPS.

Joy is the only full-time faculty member of the storytelling program at ETSU. She coordinates the program, teaches most of the courses, advies all of the students in the program, acts as thesis advisor, and edits the program's magazine, *Storytelling World* (see page 47). The students receive lessons from a larger group

A Storyteller's Progress

Adora Dupree Tells It Like It Is

One of the early graduates of the master's degree program in storytelling at ETSU is Adora Dupree, who came to the program via teaching and theater. Storytelling was a perfect niche for Dupree. Stories have been a part of her life as long as she can remember. "No matter what, I do always tell stories." And, she says, "I dreamed of being a teacher ever since I was in high school. But teachers have to teach the test these days. What I enjoy about storytelling, I'm able to teach the kids without having to deal with administrative work." She likes how stories demand interaction with the students as well. "Stories call for a response. Straight theater is removed."

Theater, she explains, has a "fourth wall." The actors play the drama as if the audience were not there, but in storytelling, "you bring down the fourth wall. I like involving audiences. They become a part of it." When she has done programs in schools, she finds students who generally are considered hard to reach will participate. "Invariably this teacher will say, 'this kid never responded before.' "

A Knoxville, Tenn., native, Dupree studied speech and theater as an undergraduate. She worked with Carpetbag Theater in Knoxville, the professional community-based theater company committed to doing original work rooted in the African-American community. In 1984 "someone asked me to do stories from a play in Carpetbag Theater. By 1986, I noticed I was starting to make money telling stories. I went to Jonesborough to see how storytellers did it." What she found was that "everyone was different." Appalachian storyteller Ray Hicks had a different subject matter and style from Jackie Torrence, an African-American who grew up not far from Ray Hicks in North Carolina. And there were other Appalachian storytellers such as Donald Davis and the Folktellers Barbara Freeman and Connie Regan-Blake who had yet another style. "Looking at that, I learned it was OK to tell stories the way I did."

Until a few years ago, however, there was not a way to make a living as a storyteller. "Storytelling is just now being taken seriously as a legitimate art form, not to mention as a way to make a living."

At ETSU, Dupree says, "I learned I knew a lot more than I gave myself credit for." She graduated in May 1993, the second African-American graduate of the master's degree program.

Today, she gives performances, works in schools and in other programs with children, and is developing a one-woman show that will use stories and songs. It is about the "future traditions of a woman of my heritage," including her African American and Cherokee history. "I want to extrapolate a world that will work for everyone," she says.

Pat Arnow

Adora Dupree watches a Girls Club performance about great women in history that she and the girls created, Johnson City, Tenn., 1993.

of storytellers through the intensive institutes.

In one of the summer institutes, David Holt is getting students to pair off and practice working on personal stories from the ideas listed on the board. First he illustrates. He tells a story of flying a kite as a boy. As he talks — teaches — he uses his body, he has the audience laughing, he is at the edge of a cliff, literally in the story. He lets go of the kite reel. The reel sails down and snags a bra off of a clothesline before the kite flies itself away over the sea on the strong winds.

"The biggest problem you will have with these stories is what to do at the end." He's not opposed to stretching the truth, but stretching can be dangerous. "I don't like to stretch the truth too much because they won't believe any of it. You can bend it, but not to the breaking point."

It's the class' turn to try.

What the Dollmaker's Children Hear

The slamming of a door
in the ears of your parents
slams doors down the infinite hallway
in your head,
and sometimes it slams out your ears
into the ears of your children.

You caution your son
that you would not have gotten away
with a certain behavior
when you were a child.
He presses you to tell what would have happened
until you tell the truth
of being thrown into a wall.
He laughs, repeating *thrown into a wall*
and mocks bouncing against the wall, the furniture,
disbelieving that any parent would cause such a vacant sound.

You shiver in bed recalling the news report
of a father scalding his baby to death.
You pulled your children to you
until your heartbeats synchronized.
They may not always be this safe.
They will one day cross a street alone,
maybe in a city they have traveled to by air.
You consider all the scraped knees,
broken grape vine swings, dating
as you hold the round shields of your pupils
up against the vast darkness.

One in a million is what your foster parents called you.
You made the grades, sang in the choir, drew the best in art
so that you could excel in survival.
You were not the people you came from,
not like the other foster children.
You were one in a million,
and your children would be happy.
They would be the wonderful people the world needed
and they would not have to hear the screams
behind their own closed door.
You would be the moon breaking the night cycle.

Your parents sent your brother to his death
on a dark night,
on a bicycle with no brakes and no reflectors
up and down the long hill to the store
for a loaf of bread,
that clinging soft impression of life.
Zane was twelve, your idol, with twinkling white teeth
and with dreams of becoming an astronaut artist.
The driver didn't see him
but you do over and over,
the waxen doll in the open casket,
the slamming of the door.

A piece of muslin is nothing.
It is a limpness of the imagination.
On the table, it calls itself simplicity without shadow.
Held to a window, it only addresses the function of a curtain,
but when you cut out a small pattern of the body,
sew and stuff it tightly,
paint the eyes with matching blue vanity,
and design a bright wig of yellow yarn,
you make a piece of muslin breathe alive.
This is your magic, your talent,
the spark through your fingers,
creating happy children with pink embroidered smiles.
Once, you sewed a music box inside
just when you thought you had lost all power and light,
and you were amazed that with the turn of the key,
you could make a simple piece of cloth sing.

— Hilda Downer

Hilda Downer teaches in the English department at Appalachian State University in Boone N.C. Her poems have been published in ***Appalachian Journal*** *and* ***Now and Then****.*

Get It Right or Don't Get It at All

The Problems of Cultural Appropriation in Storytelling

In the storytelling world, cultural appropriation, simply put, is taking tales from another culture and telling them as your own. This is an issue which affects not only the tellers but also their audiences. The willing suspension of disbelief required of the audience is based on trust. Watching a Texas cowboy relate sacred Native American myths can be as jarring as watching a white performer in black face — and just as insulting to those whose culture is being appropriated.

At one point in the late 1980s, it seemed as if there was a chance for consensus among storytellers on the issue of cultural appropriation. Storytellers gathered at a conference in New Mexico on traditional ethnic storytelling. The tellers, whom storyteller and folklorist Joseph Sobol described as having a "we are the world" mentality, expected to hear and learn traditional stories from various cultures. They hoped to take them home.

This is an issue which affects not only the tellers but also their audiences

"As it was described to me," Sobol said, "the people, especially Native Americans, felt it was inappropriate to borrow stories without understanding the cultural context, and once you understood the culture you would see it was inappropriate to tell the stories. It was a Catch-22."

As a result of this conference and another dealing with copyright violation, there was a noticeable shift in story themes. "You began to see a trend in the storytelling community," Sobol said. "Those who were telling fairy tales from every culture under the sun started developing stories drawn from their own lives. Some think it's positive; others are bored stiff." Some are still telling tales from outside their culture. Among storytellers, Sobol said, there is no party line because "there is no party. Storytellers are individualists."

The problem of borrowing tales is not new. In the Appalachian region, controversy surrounds Richard Chase, who, under the auspices of the 1930s WPA program, collected tales from Appalachian highlanders, then copyrighted and published them as *The Jack Tales* and *Grandfather Tales*.

Ray Hicks, a Beech Mountain, N.C., storyteller, considered to be the embodiment of all that is pure and noble about the art, once had a run-in with Chase. Hicks told Sobol: " 'Richard Chase stood on this porch and threatened to law me for telling Jack tales. I told him I got them from my grandfather Ben, and that shut him up.'

"Richard Chase was a pretty controversial, irascible, and imperious personality." Sobol explained. "He was a masterful storyteller, but he did some things with those stories that today would be ethically absurd."

In some cases, the ethics aren't that clear. Adora Dupree, an African-American storyteller based in Johnson City, Tenn., discussed whether it is ever appropriate for, say, a white person to tell tales which originated in the African culture. "Well, it depends on the setting," Dupree said. "It works with children in rural areas. I have a white friend who is a storyteller in rural Virginia. If she didn't tell the [African] tales, they would never hear them. In cases like that, it is more important that the tales get out there than worrying about who is telling them.

"When we try to label and limit we really run into problems," Dupree said. "There is no definable black person or black culture. Even within the confines of our own race, we are all colors, all religions, all socioeconomic classes.

"And I think that this is why the question of cultural appropriation can get

by Janet Hearne

so sticky. Take the Native Americans for instance. First off, there are how many different tribes? All of them do not have the same cosmology. They don't all see the world in the same way. They don't have the same stories to explain how creation happened. If you are telling a Native American tale, you need to get more specific in terms of tribal background."

Marion Dunn, a Cherokee storyteller in La Vergne, Tenn., agreed. "There are so many [storytellers] mixing the cultures. I tell all the children there were over a thousand tribes and to lump them all together is just as dumb as saying the French, English, and Italian are all the same. I think that people had better know their history — I mean *know* it. You cannot be authentic if you don't know what you're talking about.

"Cherokee mythkeepers have a way of telling which is in our way of talking rather than the anglo or black. We have our tribal ways. Our culture was in the forming for some 20,000 years."

Dunn said she has spent a lifetime learning the stories. She first heard them from her grandmother in whose house she was reared. "We would go out every night and look at the firmament, and she would tell me stories. She instilled in me a love of creation before I knew what she was about."

Dunn's grandmother was "about" history and the betrayal of the Cherokee. Her family began the journey along the Trail of Tears, but, as Dunn explains it, the family "snuck back into Tennessee like criminals" where they were treated brutally by whites. Dunn's great-grandfather moved on to the Indian Territory; her great-grandmother stayed in Tennessee and reared her two children. This is the history Dunn asks storytellers to "know" before they tell Cherokee tales. "My people have been exploited for five hundred years," she said. There is kindness in her voice, but I hear the unasked question: How can you possibly know us?

"If you are telling a Native American tale, you need to get more specific in terms of tribal background."

Stories are not gentle little things — they have heart and blood and bone. They are the very life of a culture; they bear witness to the truth.

Marion Dunn knows these things and yet she does not say, "You may not tell our stories." She merely says, "Please, get it right."

Janet Hearne is a writer in Johnson City, Tenn. Her recently published book ***Only in California*** *tracks not cultural appropriations, but cultural absurdities.*

In My Babysitter's House

The rooms were worlds
apart, each from each,
when I was waist-high to Wallace.

In one with sunshine and coffee cans of dirt,
my friends and I dug with fingernails
and sowed our seeds, watering
the sprouts with drops
of saliva.
In another we created our own songs
on broken piano keys.
And in the kitchen we formed dough people
with our sticky fingers.

Late one afternoon, though,
these worlds collided
with a slight push
up the dark stairs.
Wallace thrusted me
into uncharted worlds.
Up there in his room with centerfolds and footballs,
(the sitter watching soaps, the baby asleep,
the others gone home,)
he asked me if I had practiced
on the plastic grape.
I nodded a quiet yes—

then with one motion
he unzipped his pants,
flipped out his penis,
and pulled my head to it.

I can remember nothing after that,

except walking back down those stairs

into rooms now marked
with cracked plaster.

— Jim Minick

Jim Minick teaches English at Radford University, Radford, Va. He is coordinator for the Appalachian Studies Youth Conference in Blacksburg, Va., in 1994.

The Last of 'The Waltz Across Texas' and Other Stories

by Jo Carson

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$10.50 (paperback)

Poet, playwright, and children's author, Jo Carson's new collection of short fiction, *The Last of 'The Waltz Across Texas' and Other Stories*, amply demonstrates the author's talent in another literary form. The familiar Carson features are here in abundance: ironic humor, wacko comic predicaments, and dialectic fidelity. These stories, however, are considerably more than a display of the Carson trademarks. In them we hear the distinctive Carson voice but now in one volume we also have the opportunity of a sustained look at her vision, which, as Flannery O'Connor reminded us, is the key to the stature of a writer. In her other works we are offered glimpses of how she sees the world, but that vision has been restricted in part by the nature of the genres in which she has worked: by history and experience in her dramas, by audience in children's stories, and literally what was overheard in *People Pieces*. In these stories the imaginaton is restrained only by the art of fiction as perceived by the writer. Here is Carson on the wing and the perfomance yields both delights and lessons.

While the features of voice may be the same in the stories as those in Carson's earlier works and immediately recognizable, vision is a matter considerably more complicated, the one quality the reader must find or discover but which the writer must veil or even hide because of the dictates of art. We all have voices, but the purpose of art, says Joseph Conrad in the preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, is to make us see.

What, then, do these stories of Carson make us see? What can be said at this point in her career of Carson's vision? Is it comic or tragic or both? Regional or universal or both? Mimetic or original or both? Christian or humanistic or both? These are difficult questions which the work of any serious (or humorous) writer ought to raise. To be sure they are too complex to deal with in any elaborate manner in a review. In Carson's case it is especially important to pose these questions to give critical justice a fair chance in evaluation of this volume and to keep it from falling too readily into the traps of regional humor.

I use the plural of traps because they are several for the Appalachian or Southern writer with a penchant for humor such as Carson. Tradition and individual talent, T.S. Eliot argued, can work quite well together, but the Southern or Appalachian woman writer who uses humor of the absurd variety is apt to feel more than a twinge of anxiety of influence considering such forebears as O'Connor and Eudora Welty. The first trap, though, lies not with the writer but with the reader or critic who may be prone to label any comic endeavor as a pale imitation of the work of earlier genius. The second trap is the rather widespread belief that humor is somehow inferior to the serious and that any ficiton with a lot of comedy in it cannot be of top quality. Never mind that Roger Caillois placed play and by extension humor on a higher level than the serious because the playful can be serious, but the serious can't be playful or that Flannery O'Connor said that the maximum of comedy admits the maximum of seriousness. A third trap for any Southern or Appalachian writer with a keen sense of humor is local color which has become synonymous with regionalism, suggesting a patronizing vision limited to the reporting of local eccentricities.

Remarkably, Carson has worked her way around all these traps. She doesn't even appear to know they're there — though we know that she does know. The American writer, Melville said, must be bold, and Carson is bold, even when walking through a mine field. Perhaps "confident" is a better word. The humor in these stories, even in the ones where pain and unhappiness prevail, is genuinely distinctive. It is almost always ironic and often hilarious as in Carson's masterpiece "Big Yellow Onions" which would grace any collection. Neither O'Connor nor Welty would have written it and Lee Smith and Lisa Alther could have but didn't. Carson could and did, and we're all the beneficiaries. What it took Freud to say in *Civilization and its Discontents* she said in a few pages and offered a key to the resolution of eternal tensions. I do not want to imply that it stands head and shoulders above the other stories, which have virtues of their own, but it is such an amazing blend of wild comedy and high seriousness that it deserves special praise. It is clearly the winner in the collection, but the rest are in the race with the title story, "Hunting Husbands," "Maybe," and "Splitshin" competing for second.

While giving comedy its due in this collection, it is just as important not to overrate its role and thereby miss the key to Carson's vision. With all due respect to the author of it, the following sentence on the cover is rather misleading: "This is a comedy of survival." Some of the characters survive, some don't, and some prevail, but whatever the outcome there is something other than comedy at work. For those who learn something about themselves, Rowena in "Hunting Husbands," for example, "grace" is as good a word as any. With grace comes courage, a sense of independence, and sacrificial love, the old verities as Faulkner called them, and when a character is shown in a convincing manner to exhibit them, humor eases out of the picture. We don't laugh at or with Rowena at the end. Instead we are moved to admiration, maybe tears. Rowena doesn't survive or endure; she prevails. Dignity and backbone always do.

Humor may well be medicinal for those who are merely surviving or enduring but it is scarcely salvational. Instead it is symptomatic, as O'Connor well knew, of some warping from some center of sanity and dignity where grace mysteriously abounds. Carson uses absurdity in the same general manner as O'Connor, as a sense of displacement from some higher truth or goodness accepted on faith but which neither they nor we can identify or describe. Hence art becomes an ally in the quest for a deeper vision, a sort of running grotesquerie that, to paraphrase Randall Stewart on William Faulkner, is not a commentary on conditions in a re-

gion but insight into the main human condition therein. We should remember that the grotesque, according to Webster, "is distinguished from the ugly in that it provides a positive aesthetic satisfaction."

It is important to note that Carson's characters do not set out merely to survive. What they want is meaning, even if it means only trying to hitch a ride as in "Assumptions." What they usually seek is love whose main contender is often alcohol. In several of these stories alcohol is a force of fate, and cars are almost minor characters conveying the main ones to and from heartache. Carson's characters will do anything for love: chain cars to furniture, shoot, kill, and even steal the dead as in "Splitshin." One of the characters in this story is called "Love" so that at one point we have this question concerning his whereabouts: "Where's Love?" Where is love or what happened to it when we thought we had it? These may be the questions of the ages and Carson engages them repeatedly.

Whereas O'Connor's characters comically stand in need of redemption by God, Carson's for the most part look for love from one another, also comically (quite often). In O'Connor's view the south was "Christ haunted"; Carson's world is similar in some respects. Evan King in "His Father's Work" is obsessed by his own peculiar anti-Communist Jesus as he forges his "Church of the Klan of Heaven." Here is something of the spirit of Hazel Motes of W*ise Blood* as is also evident in "Free Will" in John Rupert's effort to get the Mustang back from Raynall who has chained it to her furniture in the trailer, wreaking havoc in the process. Like Hazel, he protests too much: "I've done this of my own free will and it's got nothing to do with God."

A more appropriate term to explain the motivation of most of Carson's characters would be "love haunted" rather than "Christ haunted." However related these terms might be, there is a difference in vision between the two writers. There is also a difference in technique which needs noting. To capture the flavor of dialect as opposed to "photographing" it in detail as earlier writers had done, O'Connor would merely change a spelling now and then such as in "estimit"; Carson doesn't bother to do even this but achieves the same effect. She relies instead on syntax and accurate rendering of the colloquial statement and of course on humor: "I don't won't no youngens," said Raynell. "My Mama said my brother and me ruined all her good chairs."

Usually in Carson's stories love doesn't work, leaving in its wake mere survival, with medicinal comedy or without. Even Raynell and John Rupert may not make it work over the long haul of marriage as we see in "Free Will," but when the prospect for it first seems promising, as in "Big Yellow Onions," hope, if not grace itself, lights up the pages. The rise and fall of love is an old story and probably the same in Appalachia, as Carson suggests, as everywhere else. Without doubt Jo Carson is one straining to understand love and to illuminate in art what she beholds. Her ongoing quest, as reflected in this collection, is worthy of our applause.

—Robert J. Higgs

Robert J. (Jack) Higgs is an Appalachian scholar and leading thinker on sports and religion at East Tennessee State University.

Small Caucasian Woman
stories
by Elaine Fowler Palencia

University of Missouri Press
2910 LaMone Blvd.
Columbia, MO 65201
$19.95 (hardback)
1993

The short stories in *Small Caucasian Women* concern women who have come of age too early, enduring the tragedy of girlhood ending and the loss of innocence. But most face their fates with clear-eyed practicality. They still love but not in a sentimental way. These characters show their love by doing what needs to be done without fanfare. Their troubles have not made them bitter but given them a flat humor.

In "Pecans," a brother calls to announce to his sister he hasn't seen in three years that he is 20 miles away and on his way to "Blue Valley," a tiny Eastern Kentucky town that provides the backdrop for all the stories. His sister describes what she does next: "I made myself another drink and sat back down with the book. But with company coming it seemed like I ought to do more, so I got up and opened a box of baking soda and put it in the refrigerator.

"In a little while I heard a car in the street. I changed the TV from the soap to a movie on the Arts & Entertainment network and stepped out on the porch."

None of the stories lets the reader off easy; all have an edge, but "Stealing Sugar" is particularly chilling, the story of little girls suffering from sexual abuse and being further abused by an adult conspiracy of willful ignorance. "The Man I Love," which is couched in a comic vein, the interview of a "competitively obese" woman, shows the pain of growing out of unselfconscious girlhood and into the strictures (literally — a girdle) imposed by the workings of the grown-up world.

Some of the people recur in various stories — or a cousin may come in to tell a story. Each reappearance is welcome for these characters are too interesting to leave behind after a few pages. They are as interwoven in the stories as the residents of a small town. They know and tell their own and each other's stories, sometimes with great perception, sometimes missing entirely, leaving the reader in a conspiracy with the author about what really happened. It's intimate and effective, giving the reader a sense of being on the inside along with the other natives of Blue Valley.

The strongest stories in the collection are about everyday flawed people facing mundane problems and making their way through, stolidly and even heroically. In "The Best-Dressed Man in Dayton," Dreama Forrester leaves the farm where she worked "sixteen hours a day, six days a week," and moved to Cincinnati, determined not to go home again. She's remembering being 16 and a waitress in the city. "I'd say, 'Only way you'd get me to go home would be to ship me back dead in a pine box. And when it got there and they opened it, I wouldn't be in it!'"

When it looks like she must return home after all, she tries to talk about it with a man she is dating, who tells her not to worry. "For a little, I did forget my troubles as I looked at those Ohio River bridge lights hanging in the night. I recalled what I'd heard about Newport around the diner: about the casinos and the big-name entertainers, the fancy restaurants and the dark-complected men that ran things, and about the bodies found in alleys. The big time at last, I thought. My purse and my shoes match, and I'm with the Best-Dressed Man in Dayton." Dreama does manage to avoid going home, and ends the story with some "advice to the young girls," a list that is at the same time hard-boiled, funny and tender, leaving the reader with a wrenching feeling that this woman has summed up her life in the most unblinkingly honest terms; she had faced and accepted her fate without making any more or less of it than it is.

In a few of the stories, the situations in which the characters find themselves are not so every day, and there is the satisfaction of justice served at the end. The small Caucasian woman of the title story, a former resident of Blue Valley who has reappeared after many years away, spirits an old man out of a nursing home with the assistance of the inmates. The story has to do with the roles that a town expects of its residents and how not everyone conforms to the standards of behavior set by their family's position (or lack of position) in the community. There is a simple truth to this story, making the ending particularly satisfying. "The Lesson," a terrifying and brutal story, ends with a similar satisfaction.

The stories are at times even otherworldly. There is a ghost in "To Die in Singapore" and a spirit of some kind in "Flight Out of Egypt."

The contrivances in some of these stories are not as disturbing as they might be because even the most contrived stories work well as part of the whole. I am afraid that on their own, they may lack the complex layers and textures of the collection when read all together. But this collection should be read as a whole. It is altogether satisfying.

— Pat Arnow

An American Homeplace
by Donald McCaig

Crown Publishers
201 East 50th Street
New York, New York 10022
1992
$20 (hardback)

Anyone who has heard Donald McCaig tell stories about farm life in rural Virginia on National Public Radio or has read his essays in *Harpers, The Atlantic,* and *Country Journal* about the picturesque and embattled family farm will find *An American Homeplace* a rare treat. Readers of some of his earlier books, such as *Nop's Trials* , *Eminent Dogs,* and *Dangerous Men*, will also appreciate his down-to-earth, touching, humorous, and honest descriptions, in this, his latest book, of raising livestock, living off the land, working with his well-known border collies, and sharing a farm community.

In *An American Homeplace,* McCaig explores the traditions of American homesteading and chronicles his own flight 20 years ago with his wife, Anne, from the urban scene in New York City to a farm and a new way of life in sparsely populated Highland County, Va. He describes in detail the commitment, hard work, frustrations, and rewards of rebuilding an abandoned farm from the ground up and discovering a home.

McCaig discusses the geographical and cultural history of his own farm. He also comments on attitudes towards farming in the past. For example, early settlers were not committed to the land, and many landowners lived elsewhere and did not have to suffer the consequences of poor land management. These landowners hired overseers who were "paid a small percentage of the crops" they raised, and whose "only goal" was "maximum short-term production." The idea was to get rich quick, particularly with such cash crops as tobacco, and get out. McCaig reminds us that Thomas Jefferson claimed "that it was cheaper to clean new soil than it was to conserve old."

The section, "Farming," deals with everything from the pride and scant cash of local farmers to fences, hay-making, sheep-shearing, and "The Boys in the Lime-Green Chevrolet" who drive around at the opening of deer season shooting ewes who have just lambed. This reveals in a philosophical mode both the bright and the dark sides of farming.

The next section, on "Animals," pays much attention to the value to a farm of the working stock dog. Border collies figure prominently in the scheme of things. While McCaig emphasizes "the difficulties and responsibilities of owning a stock dog," the lyrical quality of pastoral life is seldom absent:

> One December evening you'll go out to bring in the bred ewes and it'll be drivin' snow, and those hummocks way at the far end of the pasture might be sheep and might not, too, and the light will be failing. Quietly, you'll send your dog into the dusk, where his knowledge and heart will bring your sheep safely home. That's why stock dogs have one-syllable names: Ben, Nell, Pip, Lass, Cap, Hope. You can cry their names into the teeth of the wind.

The section on "Neighbors" focuses on "the folks born in Highland County who expect to die in Highland County," The Bath-Highland Volunteer Fire Department, and the "Best Four Days in Highland County" — The Highland County Fair. The theme of neighbors helping neighbors is a constant under-current to this section.

The last and perhaps most significant section of the book is devoted to "The Land Stewards." McCaig writes about the stoic attitudes and sense of moral imperative of his predeccessors. He talks about how Scott and Helen Nearing, who wrote *Living the Good Life,* their 1954 homesteading biography, influenced his choice of lifestyle. Wendell Berry, contemporary agrarian poet and essayist, also gives McCaig sustenance for his philosophy. Says Berry:

> The human community is not a gift. It needs to be made in response to nature. You can't talk about culture without talking about agriculture because how your food is produced is cultural — the ultimate well-being. Our identity as human beings has to be conserved and you can't conserve your identity by yourself. You can't keep faith by yourself.

McCaig also credits Wes Jackson, an

agriculturalist from the Land Institute, and Maury Telleen, editor of *The Draft Horse Journal*, with helping to shape his own committment to land management.

If anyone has ever painted a portrait with words of the ideals and realities of farmsteading in America, Donald McCaig has with *An American Homeplace*. Entertaining, informative, and inspiring, *An American Homeplace* is a good book to come home to.

— Ginger Renner

Ginger Renner is working on a master's degree in storytelling at ETSU and has raised a number of border collies in the last 16 years.

More Homesteading

Hogwild: A Back-To-The-Land Saga by Jock Lauterer is another book by a modern homesteader. In 1974 journalist Jock Lauterer and his wife Maggie joined the back-to-the-land movement and with five other families purchased a 300-acre tract of land in the mountains of Western North Carolina. They were escaping the disillusionment of their times and trying to live according to their ideals. "If we couldn't save the world, then we'd work on improving our own world in a small and intensely personal way; we would make our lives harmonious with nature and the physical world as we found it," explains Lauterer in the forward.

Over the next four years they labored over the building of a log home they christened "old Tom" as well as several other log homes and outlying buildings on the land the new residents called "Hogwild."

Hogwild is 228 pages of excerpts from the diary of those years, Lauterer's "Chronicles of Tom," and is illustrated with many black-and-white photos that document the story.

Hogwild is published by Appalachian Consortium Press, University Hall, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C. 28608. Cost is $12.95 (paperback).

"When it's time, we come out on this porch and take our ease, and talk, as naturally as treefrogs in the poplars sing toward dark."
— Jim Wayne Miller
The Mountains Have Come Closer

Master Storytellers at Work

Tall Tales of the Blue Ridge: Stories from the Heart of Appalachia is a half-hour videotape produced by Eastern National Park and Monument Association, the publications partner of the National Park Service. The videotape includes segments featuring storytellers Ray Hicks, Donald Davis, and Sparky Rucker. Ray Hicks is filmed at his home on Beech Mountain, N.C., telling raucous mountain tales to his wife and friends. Donald Davis tells stories of everyday life from his family background and mountain heritage in a small country store. African-American storyteller Sparky Rucker spins his tales for youngsters in a North Carolina school.

The goal of the producers of the videotape was to feature master storytellers from the region in settings that demonstrated the importance of story performance to Appalachia's past, present, and future.

The tape is introduced by Jean Haskell Speer, director of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services. Tapes may be purchased for $17.95 at various outlets along the Blue Ridge Parkway or in other national parks or by writing to Eastern National, 210 Riceville Road, Asheville, NC 28805 or calling 704-298-2774.

Pennsylvania Gothic

From a letter of instruction to a daughter about
to 'set up housekeeping.' Somerset County, 1860.

First build a goodly fire in the back yard
and set the tubs so smoke wont blow in your eyes
if the wind be pert. Shave a hole good cake
of lie soap in the water when its bilin
and then set to and sort the washin out.

Make three piles — one pile white an one pile cullords
another pile for britches and for rags.
Stir flour in cold water to make starch
and thin it down a mite with bilin water.

Rub dirty spots on board. Scrub hard then bile.
Rub cullords but dont bile just rench and starch.
Take white things from the tub with broomstick handle
then rench blew and starch. Spred tea tiles on
the grass then hang old rags out back on the fence -
pore rench water in the flower bed. Scrub porch
with all the soapy water left. Turn tubs
upside down.

Now put on a clean dress -
smooth your hair with side combs - brew a cup
of tea and rest. Rock a spell and count your blessings.

— Joan Aiello

Joan Aiello lives in Munhall, Pa. The poem comes from an old letter she came across.

Blow The Tannery Whistle

a video written and narrated
by Gary Carden
Davenport Films
Route 1, Box 527
Delaplane VA 22025
1993
$30 (plus $4 shipping and handling)

It is up on his porch in the tiny town of Sylva in Western North Carolina that dramatist Gary Carden spins some of an enthralling new video narrative called *Blow the Tannery Whistle*. Some of this wistfully comic story of a mountain childhood is told against other backdrops, from the heart-lifting beauty of the highland slopes and summits to downtown Sylva, the old tanyard, the cemetery, and the remnants of the farmland where Carden was raised. Personalized by family pictures and historic photos of Sylva in the years of World War II, producer Tom Davenport's video art is a keeper.

Arthur and Agnes Carden's old white farmhouse, only a good strong spit from the Sylva-Cullowhee business strip, is now Carden's home. He was three years old when he was set down here with a little poke of his belongings by a widowed teenage mother who then caught the bus for Knoxville and a new life.

The place may not be haunted, but Gary Carden is. The senseless shooting of his young musician father by the town drunk, the loss of his mother who simply couldn't cope, his bittersweet reception to the somewhat bony bosom of his father's bereaved and life-weary old parents, all left the little scratch on a child's life record that trips the stylus at one place again, again, again.

One of the mountains' finest writers, Carden first made his own story into a play, called *The Raindrop Waltz*. It turns up also in his stage monologues; he wrote it into an audio tape, and now this warm and funny video.

A burdened childhood is not the only theme in his work. His mime play, *The Uktena*, based on Cherokee myth, was first professionally staged in Atlanta in 1985, and received excellent reviews. His published stories cover the landscape of mountain humor, touched, sometimes, with a light brush of sadness.

It is a comic event that gives the title to one story and the video itself, *Blow The Tannery Whistle*. It seemed like the end of the world had come to Jackson County on October 18, 1940, when the aurora borealis swatched the night sky above the hills in astonishing (and wholly unfamiliar) brilliant rainbow hues.

Even the Yankee owners of the local tannery cocked an ear for Gabriel's trumpet; in a rare acknowledgment of human values, the bosses blew the sacred time-clock whistle, and sent the workers home early to meet doom with their families.

Thus was born the local exclamation saved for the most extraordinary news. "Well blow the tannery whistle!" The exclamation also suits this most extraordinary set of charming tales.

— Dot Jackson

Dot Jackson is a free-lance writer and lives in Six Mile, S.C.

Storytelling Publications

Storytelling World is sponsored by East Tennessee State University's Storytelling Master's Degree Program. It is produced twice a year by an all-volunteer staff. Each issue of the two-year-old magazine has a theme. Personal stories, history telling, twice-told tales, tickling tales have been the themes thus far. Children's stories, multicultural tales, story voice and inspirational tales are theme issues in the works for 1994 and '95. *Storytelling World* is geared toward storytelling practitioners with "how-to" features ("How to avoid forgetting a story or drawing a blank," "Creating the history story,") and "Ask the Experts," an advice column with professional storytellers answering readers' questions ("I just can't get *started* in a story performance . . .") Most of the contents are stories that pertain to the theme. In tickling tales, for instance, is "The Tooth, The Whole Tooth, and Nothing but the Tooth" by Roger B. Petersen and "Chubb Minegear and His Untippable Outhouse" by Donna Shedlarz. Contributors are well-known professional storytellers and those who are just getting started.

Storytelling World is a fully refereed journal. It is $7.95 a year and may be ordered from ETSU Box 70647, Johnson City, TN 37614-0647.

NAPPS, the National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling, produces several publications for storytellers and their fans. They currently issue a quarterly publication, *Storytelling Magazine*, which has features on the uses for stories such as "Telling Tales About Science and Math" about helping change perceptions by "factoring in fun and adventure." There are also profiles, short items about storytellers and storytelling programs, resources and a short short story. A monthly newsletter, *The Yarnspinner,* keeps the storytelling community abreast of each other's doings. *Journeys* is a catalog with tapes and books. NAPPS also produces a national storytelling directory which lists their members' names and addresses as well as events and storytelling organizations by state.

People who become members of NAPPS receive all of these publications and other benefits including discounts for the storytelling festival. Cost of membership is $40 per year. For more information contact NAPPS at P.O. Box 309, Jonesborough, Tenn. 37659.

"Humans are the animals that tell stories. This characteristic defines us more clearly than the opposable thumb."
— Jane Yolen

Music

I first saw Nimrod Workman at the John Henry Festival in West Virginia. He was a man who moved with all limbs and spoke with all internals. He was long and thin and in his mid- to late 70s. Workman was born in 1895 and now lives in East Tennessee with his wife of 64 years, Molly. He spent 44 years in the mines. He stood alongside Mother Jones helping to establish a union for the coal miners. He has spent a lifetime singing, "speeching," and fighting for what he believes.

I recently asked Workman at his home in Strawberry Plains, Tenn., near Knoxville, about a song he sings, "The Wild Boar's Den." "Did you ever have an experience with any wild boars?"

"I used to go up them creeks. There was an old fella, I'm trying to think of his name. You'd get out and start to go hunting, and I'd hear something coming — slash, slash, slash, and I'd look up the creek. I couldn't see no head. It was a man, and he had one of them big wild hogs — cut open — with hair on its nose and hide — cut open with its guts cut out — he'd crawl up inside that hog — blood running all down his ears and he like to scare me to death."

Molly interjected there, "Did you think you saw Satan, Nimrod?"

"He throwed that big hog on his back holding its front legs. Used to be a lot of wild hogs. They was bad — mean — they was bad now. They could smell you coming. They'd be off from you — you hear em' come, urrgurrg. . ." (Nimrod was growling at this point, moving his hands claw-like and his head from side to side) "Then you hear another one — urrgurrg."

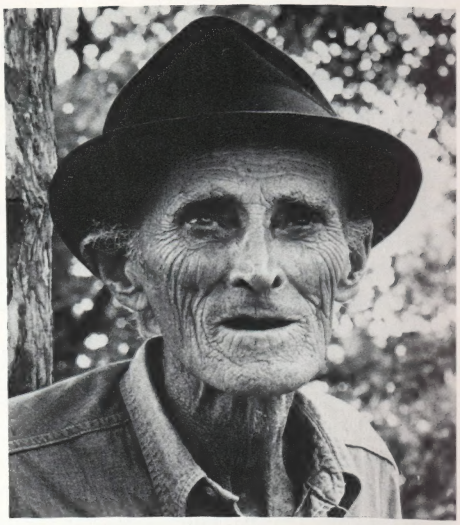
"Then what would you do?" I asked.

"Climb a tree."

Molly said, "Nim was singing this song ("The Wild Boar's Den") long before I met him. I wasn't used to his singing these silly songs. I was raised singing Christian songs. Sometimes he would get on my nerves so bad, I'd tell him to shut up."

Workman turns 98 November 5. He and Molly will celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary February 25 ("If the Lord willing," as Molly said.)

The most well-known songs Workman has written are "Mother Jones' Will" and "Black Lung Song." He is featured in the movie, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, singing "Amazing Grace." His daughter, Phyllis Boyens, played Loretta Lynn's mother in the film. Recordings by Workman include: *Mother Jones' Will* and *Come All You Coal Miners*, Rounder Records; and *Passing Through The Garden,* June Appal Records. These have excellent liner notes



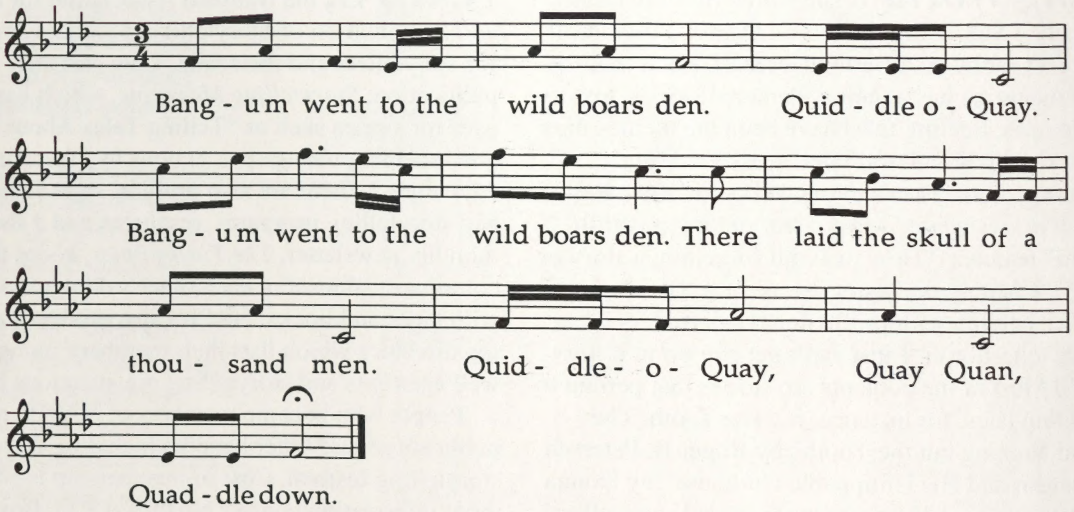
Nimrod Workman

that offer insight into his life. Appalshop has also documented his life in a film called, *Nimrod Workman, To Fit My Own Category*.

"The Wild Boar's Den" probably comes from English or Scottish origins. John Jacob Niles has a history of the song and three interesting American versions in his songbook, *The Ballad Book of John Jacob Niles*. Workman sings both "Bangum" and "Biler." The day I visited him, he sang it three times and each time it was different.

—Ed Snodderly

THE WILD BOAR'S DEN


Bang - um went to the wild boars den. Quid - dle o - Quay.
Bang - um went to the wild boars den. There laid the skull of a
thou - sand men. Quid - dle - o - Quay, Quay Quan,
Quad - dle down.

Bangum went to the wild boar's den
Quiddle o quay
Bangum went to the wild boar's den
There laid the skull of a thousand men
Quiddle o quay— quan— quaddle down

Here come the wild boar cuttin' and slash
Quiddle o quay
Here come the wild boar cuttin' and slash
gnawin' on hickory, white oak, and ash
Quiddle o quay—quan— quaddle down

The biler he made a wooden knife
Quiddle o quay
The biler he drew his wooden knife
He put an end to the wild boar's life
Quiddle o quay— quan— quaddle down.

Fishing canto

it's not fishing but the idea of fishing
that makes me mad for the metaphysical fish
that i turn allback and bless each one.
when i am not there, neither are the fish.
i fish, therefore, i am
a fisherman.
i stand in a long line of fisherman,
one you could cast to the moon.
jesus and isaak walton
teddy roosevelt and trout fishing in america.
moses was reputed to be a fisherman
but i do not count those who will not wade.
i cast to a jazza beat
and improvise the rhythm river
and think of logos —
universal and necessary.
and, tho it is metaphysical,
i do not fish in caves
nor in drawing rooms.
and when i am fishing well
i forget mathematics.
i cast to rainbow brown and brook.
and when i fish at night
i tie my number 24 goldribbed icarus
on tippet thin as hope
and cast to pisces.
i have fished the caney fork and the little gunpowder
the bearverdam and the westeastmiddle prongs.
i have fished the compliment and idea,
the big two-hearted and memory.
i have fished 1492 and your mother's hat.
i have fished stratford-on-avon and walden pond
and left no footprints on the banks of haiku.
i am absolutely mad and drink too much
and smoke 'em when i got 'em.
in my metafishical travels i have come to see
the importance of many things
most especially good knots

— Keith Miles

Keith Miles is a former resident of East Tennessee now living in Nashville where is is Senator James Sasser's director of communications.

Crowder Peas

That same summer I grew crowder peas.
Lucky they were on the uphill side,
so's I could shell 'em where they stood
and roll the peas down to the house.
One of them got away from me, though—
came crashing across the yard
and knocked down a corner of the porch.
Charlie brought over his crosscut saw
and we divided it share-and-share.
I chunked mine up with the kindling ax
and cooked it piece by piece
to go with the tomatoes.
You got to know the gas was terrible
before I learned to throw in
a whole box of baking soda—
swelled up from the first batch
like I'd foundered. Took my pocket knife
and punched a little hole in my belly—
saved my life. What? Of course it's true—
why, here's the very knife I did it with.

—David Black

David Black teaches English at Louisa County High School in Virginia. His poetry frequently appears in ***Now and Then*** *and other journals.*

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